

Psalm 110

Corpus Christi Year C
Evening Prayer for Sundays 1-4
Evening Prayer for Feasts of Trinity, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart
Christ the King, Transfiguration, Exaltation of the Cross, All Saints

This is a royal psalm. Other royal psalms are Psalm 2, which speaks of the rebellion of vassals, Psalms 20-21 which are prayers for before and after a battle, Psalm 45 to be prayed on the occasion of a royal wedding, and Psalm 72 concerning just government. Psalm 110 includes an oracle at the enthronement of the king including a reference to the priestly aspects of his power, with a reference to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Jebusite Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18-19). The following texts also focus on the priestly functions of the king.

When those who bore the ark of YHWH had gone six paces, David sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ... They brought in the ark of YHWH, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before YHWH. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of YHWH of hosts.

– 2Samuel 6:13,17-18; also 24:25

David's sons were priests.

– 2Samuel 8:18

Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of YHWH. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

– 1Kings 3:15

The king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood.

– 1Kings 8:14

Psalm 110 includes a reference to the king's military prowess.

David killed twenty-two thousand men of the Arameans.... David won a name for himself. When he returned, he killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And YHWH gave victory to David wherever he went.

– 2Samuel 8:5,13-15

This psalm was used as a legitimation of the kingly power of the Maccabean Simon who was supreme commander of the army, high priest and also governor with absolute power (see 1 Maccabees 13-14). It is a Messianic psalm, looking forward to the time when the kingly and the priestly office would be one.

To be seated at the right hand is to be in the position of power and authority.

Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

– Psalm 80:17

To place one's foot on the neck of one's enemies is to demonstrate that they are your slaves.

When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said to the chiefs of the warriors who had gone with him, 'Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.' Then they came near and put their feet on their necks.

– Joshua 10:24

The New Testament frequently calls on this text in relation to Jesus:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?'

– Mark 12:35-37 (= Matthew 22:41-46, Luke 20:41-44)

You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.'

– Mark 14:62 (= Matthew 26:64, Luke 22:69)

The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

– Mark 16:19

David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'

– Acts 2:34-35 [Peter speaking on day of Pentecost]

Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

– Romans 8:34

He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

– 1Corinthians 15:25-26

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

– Ephesians 1:20 (see Colossians 3:1)

To which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?

– Hebrews 1:13

**²YHWH extends
from Zion the
power of your sceptre.
Subdue your
enemies in battle.**

A priest like Melchizedek

³Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you mobilise your forces. From your mother's womb you enjoy a sacred majesty; from the dawn, the fresh dew of youth.

⁴YHWH has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'.

⁵YHWH is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath*.

⁶He will execute judgment* among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter heads over the wide earth.

⁷He will drink from the stream by the path, and so hold high his head.

The text is somewhat obscure. The Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate translate verse 3 as referring to the day of the king's enthronement on God's holy mountain. God is adopting the young king as his son, his freshness reminding the psalmist of the early morning dew. They translate: 'From the womb before the dawn I begot you'.

Being of the tribe of Judah, the king could not hold the office of a priest of Levi. His priesthood, however, was a superior one, for he was responsible not to care for the holiness of the cult but to be God's instrument in making holy the whole land and its people, by seeing that the will of God was done 'on earth as in heaven'.

In the New Testament (see especially Hebrews 5:6; 5:10 and chapter 7) this text is applied to Jesus to underline the fact that the priestly mediation of Jesus is the mediation of the Messiah-king who is God's instrument, chosen to bring about the reign of God's love in the world. This is the priesthood into which all the baptised are consecrated, called as Jesus' followers are, to carry the mission of Jesus to all the world. Those who are chosen to exercise pastoral priesthood in the Christian community are ordained into the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek, mediating God's word to the assembly, and mediating the assembly's offering of its life to God.

The psalmist continues the military theme. The king's victory is an expression of God's patronage and of God's judgment against his foes.

YHWH will ensure refreshing water to slake the thirst of his anointed king, weakened in the heat of battle, and the king will lift up his head, not suffering the shame of defeat but enjoying victory over his enemies.