

PSALMS 110 – A DIVINE PRIESTLY KING FROM A NEW PRIESTHOOD? NOT!!!¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The many direct references and allusions in the New Testament to the 110th chapter in the Book of Psalms has turned it into the source of several popular so-called “messianic prophecies”, the alleged fulfillment of which, by Jesus, are claimed to be the referenced accounts in the New Testament.

Consequently, Psalms 110 contains a number significant so-called “proof texts” in the portfolio of the Christian missionary, and these allegedly foretell the divinity, priesthood, and proximity to God of the Christian messiah, which, along with other attributes, are described in various accounts throughout the New Testament.

A rigorous analysis of the Hebrew text in this psalm, and its placement in the proper context, demonstrate how these claims have no support from within the Hebrew Bible.

II. COMPARING CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF KEY VERSES

Side-by-side English renditions and the Hebrew text of the first five verses from the 110th chapter in the Book of Psalms are displayed in Table II-1. Some of the verses from the King James Version (KJV) “Old Testament” translation point to cross-referenced passages in the New Testament. These references are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). However, the corresponding passages below the table are quoted from the KJV for consistency.

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter ש is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ח is transliterated as “h̄”
 - The letter ט is transliterated as “ch”
 - The letter ק is transliterated as “k”
 - The letter צ is transliterated as “q”
 - A vocalized ***SHVA*** (שׁ שׂ ש׃) is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
 - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the ***dagesh*** (emphasis)

Table II-1 – Psalms 110:1-2, 4-5

King James Version Translation	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Hebrew Text
Psalms 110		תהילים קי
1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. ⁽ⁱ⁾	Of David a psalm. The word of the Lord (יהוה [YHVH]) to my lord (לַאֲדֹנָי [ladoni]) (or, to my master): "Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet."	א לְדוֹד מִזְמוֹר נָאִם יְהוָה לַאֲדֹנָי שֵׁב לְיַמִּינֵי עַד-אֲשֵׁית אֲיַבִּידְךָ הַדָּם לְרַגְלֶיךָ:
2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.	The Lord (יהוה [YHVH]) will send the staff of your might from Zion; rule in the midst of your enemies!	ב מִטֵּה עֲזָרְךָ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רֹדֶה בְּקִרְבֵּךְ אֲיַבִּידְךָ:
4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	The Lord (יהוה [YHVH]) has sworn, and will not change His mind, "on my word, you are to serve for ever, King of Righteousness."	ד נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנְחַם אֶת־הַכֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דַּבְּרֹתַי מִלְכֵי-צֶדֶק:
5 The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	The Lord (אֲדֹנָי [A-donai]) is at your right hand, He has crushed kings in the day of His wrath.	ה אֲדֹנָי עַל-יַמִּינְךָ מִחַץ בְּיוֹם-אַפּוֹ מְלָכִים:

(i) **Direct "quotes":**

Matthew 22:44(KJV) - The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Mark 12:36(KJV) - For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Luke 20:42-43(KJV) – (42) And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, (43) Till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Acts 2:34-35(KJV) – (34) For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, (35) Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Hebrews 1:13(KJV) - But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Allusions:

Matthew 26:64(KJV) - Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Colossians 3:1(KJV) - If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Hebrews 8:1(KJV) - Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

Hebrews 10:12(KJV) - But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

1Corinthians 15:25(KJV) - For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

(ii) Hebrews 5:6,10(KJV) – (6) As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (10) Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 6:20(KJV) - Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 7:17,21(KJV) – (17) For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

(21) (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

(iii) Romans 2:5(KJV) - But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

A comparison of the two English translations indicates that major discrepancies exist between the Jewish and Christian renditions, particularly as it concerns the opening verse, and these will be taken up in the analysis that follows later. It is also worthwhile to note that, unlike most Christian Bibles, the KJV discards the superscription "**Of David a Psalm.**" that is part of the opening verse.

III. OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

A. Overview of the Christian Perspective

Christians view Psalms 110 as a messianic psalm fulfilled by Jesus as both the Messiah (who, in Christian theology, is greater than his ancestor, King David) and, for Trinitarians, is a divine being ("God the Son" in the Trinity).

The many direct references and allusions to it indicate that the authors of the New Testament had a great interest in this psalm. According to the Christian view, the explicit application of this psalm to Jesus is noted in several ways:

† **By Jesus himself (e.g., Matthew 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)**

† **By others (e.g., Acts 2:33-35; Hebrews 1:13; 7:20-24)**

† **By frequent references to its language throughout the New Testament (e.g., 1Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12-13)**

The extensive usage of Psalms 110 in the New Testament leaves no doubt in the mind of a Christian believer about its purely prophetic nature. In other words, the Christian view is that, when "God the Father" speaks of the Messiah, and when David prophetically refers to his descendant, the Messiah, as "**my Lord**" in Psalms 110:1, it cannot refer to just an ordinary person. Rather, it can only refer to the one who fulfills this verse in both ways, as a divine being and Messiah, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

The Christian interpretation rests on several key verses in this psalm. According to Christian sources, Psalms 110 contains at least the following

four "messianic prophecies", shown in Table III.A-1 along with their alleged respective accounts of "fulfillment" in the New Testament.²

Table III.A-1 – Alleged “messianic prophecies” in Psalms 110

#	Statement	Citation	
		“Prophecy”	“Fulfillment”
1	The Messiah would be Lord	Psalms 110:1a	Matthew 22:41-45
2	The Messiah would be at the right hand of God	Psalms 110:1b	Mark 16:19
3	The Messiah would be a Priest in the order of Melchizedek	Psalms 110:4	Hebrews 6:17-20
4	The Messiah would be at the right hand of God	Psalms 110:5	1Peter 3:21-22

In Psalms 110:1 Jesus (“**the Lord**”) is invited to sit at the right side of “God the Father” (“**the LORD**”) in glory, where he will wait for “God the Father” (“**the LORD**”) to judge the earth and bring everything and everyone into subjection under him (“**the Lord**”). Psalms 110:4 refers to a priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek,³ who came to Abram,⁴ and to whom Abram tithed one-tenth of all his goods. The Christian view is that, because Abram tithed to him, Melchizedek was greater than Abram, Levi's great-grandfather (Levi, the son of Jacob/Israel, is the progenitor of the Aaronic priesthood), even after his name was changed to Abraham and he entered into the Covenant of Circumcision. Therefore, the Melchizedek priesthood, having preceded the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, is considered by Christians to be superior to it and, thus, supplants and replaces it.⁵ Finally, Psalms 110:5 foretells how Jesus will be by God’s right hand.

More detailed commentary may be found in the standard Christian commentaries such as, Matthew Henry and Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown.⁶

B. The Jewish Perspective

Regardless of who its author was, the overall theme of Psalms 110 is that it speaks of David's legendary power, which came through divine favor that was earned by his righteousness. The author of this psalm assures King David of victory over the enemies of his people, the Jewish people.

As is often the case, several perspectives of this psalm have been offered by the Jewish Sages. The two most common interpretations are that this psalm

² For example, *Jesus is the Messiah: The Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled By Jesus Christ Ordered by Category* - <http://contenderministries.org/prophecy/jesusmessiah2.php>

³ This common Christian transliteration will be used throughout in reference to Christian claims.

⁴ Note here that it was Abram the Gentile, not Abraham the “Hebrew”, since this encounter took place before his name was changed to Abraham (in Genesis 17:5).

⁵ In Judaism, and according to Torah, the royal office (which was the domain of the Tribe of Judah) and the office of the priesthood (which was the domain of the Tribe of Levi) are separate entities, so that a priest may not be a king, and vice versa. But for Christianity, this psalm celebrates the exaltation of Jesus to the throne of an eternal and increasing kingdom and a perpetual priesthood that will see the subjugation of his enemies and the multiplication of his subjects and which is rendered a certainty by the word and oath of the Almighty.

⁶ These commentaries are available at - <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>

is about either King David or our Patriarch Abraham. Another interpretation combines these two scenarios. Still another interpretation of this psalm is messianic since David's name is associated in the Hebrew Bible with מְשִׁיחַ (*mashi'ah*), the future **King/Messiah** (e.g., Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24; Hosea 3:5).

The interpretation of this psalm by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (and adopted also by Rabbi David Qimḥi [RaDaQ]) as being about King David follows the *PSHAT*, i.e., the simple/literal reading, wherein the superscription is read as "**A Psalm for [or, concerning] David**". It entails David's ordeal with King Saul [a Benjaminite, יְמִינִי (*y^emini*), as also found in Esther 2:5 – a word that is identical to the Hebrew equivalent of the phrase **my right hand** (e.g., Psalms 137:5)]. According to this scenario, David is asked to wait until his enemy (Saul) is brought down.

The interpretation by RaSHI uses the apparent allusion to *Malki-Tsedeq* as a way to relate this psalm to Abraham and his battle with Amraphel, and his subsequent victory over the four enemy kings (see Genesis 14:12-16).

A melding of these two interpretations is possible when one reads this psalm as a prayer by an aging King David when his soldiers went to battle without him. In his prayer, King David refers to images of God's dealings with Abraham during his battle with the four kings, and he asks God to help him as He helped Abraham to prevail over his enemies.

Finally, since King David is also counted among the 55 Jewish prophets named in the Hebrew Bible, and there is use made in this psalm of verbs conjugated in the future tense, it becomes plausible that there is an allusion here to מְשִׁיחַ. As such, this psalm confirms some basic requirements מְשִׁיחַ must meet, e.g., he will be of the seed of David, victorious over all his enemies, a world leader, and a Torah scholar.

IV. WHO IS SPEAKING TO WHOM?

The Christian interpretation of Psalms 110 suffers from serious problems that are rooted in the common Christian renditions of the first verse.

A. The Superscription

Christian renditions generally do not number the superscription at the head of a psalm and, in the case of Psalms 110, the KJV deleted the superscription altogether. Yet, it is noteworthy that the Christian perspective on this psalm depends on the assumption that King David is the author and speaker. On the other hand, the various Jewish interpretations are not limited by such a restriction.

In the Hebrew text, the superscription reads לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר (*l'david mizmor*), where לְ (l-) is a preposition, דָּוִד (*David*) is the name **David**, and מִזְמוֹר (*mizmor*), as used in the Hebrew Bible, means **a psalm**. The Hebrew preposition לְ could have any of the following meanings: **to** or **for**, **by**, and **in** or **into**. Eliminating the last pair for obvious reasons, this particular superscription could indicate this psalm as having been either composed **by** David or composed **for** or dedicated **to** David. In other words, it is not possible to determine, with absolute certainty, that King David composed this psalm.

Christian missionaries will charge that this is an after-the-fact attempt to use the ambiguity to force a biased interpretation of this psalm. This claim is effectively countered with other instances in the Book of Psalms, where the preposition לְ in the superscription unambiguously means **for** and not **by**. One such example is Psalms 72, which was composed **by** King David **for** his son Solomon:

Psalms 72:1,20 – (1) A Psalm for Solomon [לְשִׁלְמוֹהַ (li'shlomoh)]. O God, give your judgments to a king; and your righteousness to a king's son. (20) The prayers of David the son of Jesse are completed.

In this case, the preposition לְ changes to לִי (*li-*) due to a rule of grammar.⁷ This example puts into question the assumption on which the Christian view of Psalms 110 is based, namely, that David had to be its author, since it is not the only possibility here. Because Psalms 110 is not written in the 1st-person relative to David, it could have been composed by someone else, perhaps someone who served under David. It is interesting to note that, in Psalms 72, King David speaks about himself in the 3rd-person in the opening and closing verses.

In another psalm attributed to David, he speaks of himself in both the 1st-person and 3rd-person in the opening verse, and ends the psalm by speaking about himself in the 3rd-person:

Psalms 144:1,10 – (1) A Psalm of David [לְדָוִד (l'david)]. Blessed is the Lord my rock, Who trains my hands for the battle; my fingers for the war; (10) Who gives salvation to the kings; Who delivers David His servant from the evil sword.

These examples demonstrate that, while it is plausible to consider King David as the author of Psalms 110 writing about himself in the 3rd-person or, perhaps prophetically, about מְשִׁיחַ, Psalms 110 could also be the work of a different author.

⁷ In cases where two consecutive Hebrew *schwa* vowel sounds would occur by prefixing a preposition, the *schwa* on the preposition changes to another vowel sound; in this case into a *hiriq*, (the [Latin] "i" sound).

B. Who Is Speaking to Whom in Psalms 110:1?

In the two renditions of Psalms 110:1 shown below, the equivalent Hebrew terms and their respective transliterations are placed in brackets following the highlighted translated phrases.

The KJV and other Christian translations render the opening verse this way:

Psalms 110:1(KJV) - The LORD [יהוה (YHVH)] said unto my Lord [לַאדֹנָי (ladoni)], Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

The common Jewish translation of the opening verse is:

Psalms 110:1 - Of David a psalm. The word of the Lord [יהוה (YHVH)] to my lord (or, to my master) [לַאדֹנָי (ladoni)]: "Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet."

Clearly, both translations cannot be correct, and a further analysis of this verse will help determine which of these is correct.

The first Hebrew term, the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, is rendered as “**The LORD**” in the KJV, and as “**the Lord**” in the Jewish translation. Both Christian and Jewish interpretations agree on this term as representing the Creator.

The next Hebrew term, לַאדֹנָי, is rendered as “**unto my Lord**” in the KJV (note the capital “**L**”), and as “**to my lord (or, to my master)**” in the Jewish translation [note the lower-case “**l**” (or “**m**”)]. The Hebrew word לַאדֹנָי consists of two components: the preposition לְ, which was discussed in Section IV.A, and which can only mean **to** in this case; and אֲדֹנָי, which is the 1st-person, singular inflexion (in the possessive form) of the noun/title אֲדֹנָי (**ADON**). Rules of Hebrew grammar cause several changes in the noun/title אֲדֹנָי when it is both inflected in the possessive form and combined with the preposition לְ.⁸

The four ways in which the 334 instances of the term אֲדֹנָי are applied in the Hebrew Bible are shown in Table IV.B-1.

⁸ The letter א (**Alef**) in the noun/title אֲדֹנָי is marked with the vowel **qAMATS**, (ָ), thereby imparting to it the sound of [Latin] “**a**”. However, when אֲדֹנָי is used in its possessive form, the **qAMATS** changes to the pseudo-vowel **hATAF-pATAH**, (ַ), which has the same grammatical “weight” as the **schwa**, except that it carries the sound of [Latin] “**a**”. Since having the **schwa** and any **schwa**-like pseudo-vowel in succession at the beginning of a word violates the rules of Hebrew grammar, a change in vowels is required. In this particular case, the א becomes silent, and the preposition לְ changes to לַ (**la-**).

Table IV.B-1 – Applications of אֲדֹנָי in the Hebrew Bible

Term	Meaning(s)	#	Sample Citations	Remarks
אֲדֹנָי	a ruler, a governor, a head of state	6	Genesis 45:9; Jeremiah 34:5	---
	appellation for addressing God	26	Isaiah 1:24; Psalms 114:7	אֲדֹנָי is <u>never</u> used for this purpose.
אֲדֹנָי	a title for a superior	202 ⁽¹⁾	Genesis 23:6; 1Samuel 16:16	Appears only in possessive forms.
	master of ..., owner of ...	103 ⁽²⁾	Genesis 24:51; Job 3:19	Appears only in plural forms, but may be in singular context.

(1) This includes all instances of אֲדֹנָי

(2) This includes three cases from the 26 instances of an appellation for addressing God

Of the 334 cases of the term אֲדֹנָי in the Hebrew Bible, 195 are inflected in the 1st-person possessive form אֲדֹנָי, and these occur both with and without prefixed prepositions. This subset of 195 cases is broken out further in terms of the various forms (with and without prepositions) in Table IV.B-2.

Table IV.B-2 – Applications of אֲדֹנָי in the Hebrew Bible

Term	Pronunciation	#	Sample Citations	Correct Translation	KJV Rendition
אֲדֹנָי	<i>adoni</i>	162	Genesis 24:18; Isaiah 36:9; Daniel 10:17	my lord/master	All but three have: my lord /master. The three exceptions have ⁽¹⁾ : my Lord (Joshua 5:14; Judges 6:13; Daniel 12:8)
לְאֲדֹנָי	<i>ladoni</i>	24 ⁽²⁾	Genesis 24:36,54,56, 32:5,6,19, 44:9,16(x2),33; 1Samuel 25:27; 2Samuel 19:29[28]; 1Kings 1:2(x2), 20:9	to/unto/for my lord/master	"... my lord /master"
			1Samuel 24:6*, 25:28*,30*,31(x2)*; 2Samuel 4:8*; 1Kings 18:13*; 1Chronicles 21:3* Psalms 110:1*	the Lord & to/for my lord/master	"... the LORD" & "... my lord " The LORD & unto my Lord
וְאֲדֹנָי	<i>vadoni</i>	6	Genesis 18:12; 2Samuel 11:11	and my lord/master	and ... my lord ; my lord also ...
בְּאֲדֹנָי	<i>badoni</i>	2	1Samuel 24:11[10]; 2Samuel 18:28	at/against my lord/master	against my lord
מֵאֲדֹנָי	<i>mei'adoni</i>	1	Genesis 47:18	from my lord/master	from my lord

(1) These three instances of **my Lord** correspond to Joshua, Gideon, and Daniel, respectively, addressing an angel.

(2) Since the specific term of interest is לְאֲדֹנָי, all 24 citations are shown. Moreover, since Psalms 110:1 is one of nine verses among these 24 citation that contain both the Tetragrammaton יהוה, and the term לְאֲדֹנָי, all nine verses are marked with an asterisk (*).

The data in Table IV.B-2 unambiguously indicate that the KJV translators understood that the term אֲדֹנָי, with and without prepositions, means “my lord” or “my master”. Specifically, as it concerns the term in Psalms 110:1, אֲדֹנָי לַאֲדֹנָי, in 23 cases the KJV has it correctly translated as “to/unto my lord/master”, yet only at Psalms 110:1 it is rendered “unto my Lord” (with the capital “L”), which imparts to it the desired Christological significance.

This manipulation by the KJV translators becomes even more evident when analyzing the nine cases where both the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, and the term אֲדֹנָי appear in the same verse. On eight occasions, the KJV has “LORD” & “lord/master”, respectively, whereas in Psalms 110:1 this is cast as “LORD” & “Lord”.

Sidebar note: According to both Biblical and Modern Hebrew, the terms אֲדֹנָי and יהוה are not connected or related. This is evident from the fact that the appellation אֲדֹנָי is never used to address God; it is used only when addressing a (mortal) man or an angel. On the other hand, as Table IV-B-1 shows, the term אֲדֹנָי is applied to both God, angels, and (mortal) men.

There is still another problem that is actually caused by the KJV translation. It was noted earlier, the first Hebrew term in Psalms 110:1, the **Tetragrammaton**, יהוה, is rendered as “**The LORD**” in the KJV, alluding to “**God the Father**” (**the Creator**), and as “**the Lord**” in the Jewish translation (this is also the case in Psalms 110:2,4), a reference to **the Creator**. It was also noted earlier that the next Hebrew term in Psalms 110:1, אֲדֹנָי, is rendered as “**unto my Lord**” in the KJV, alluding to **Jesus** (“**God the Son**”), and as “**to my lord** (or, **to my master**)” in the Jewish translation, a reference to **a human being**. But, the first word in Psalms 110:5, אֲדֹנָי (**Adonai**), which is one of several common titles used in the Hebrew Bible for **the Creator**, is rendered as “**The Lord**” in the KJV, which is now “forced” to be a reference to **Jesus** (“**God the Son**”) based on Psalms 110:1.

So, on the surface, this may not necessarily raise any eyebrows. However, once one checks the context of Psalms 110:1 and Psalms 110:5, the problem is obvious. Psalms 110:1 speaks of a time in the future, when the subject will be sitting to the right of **God (the Creator)** and waiting till his enemies are subdued (e.g., as in Psalms 27:2,6). Psalms 110:5 speaks of past situations in which **God (the Creator)** intervened and helped the subject defeat the enemy – God was present at this person's right side, by the hand that held the weapon, to strengthen him (e.g., as in Isaiah 41:13, Psalms 16:8, 121:5).

Going by the respective renditions in the KJV, Psalms 110:1 speaks of “**the Lord**” (**Jesus**, who is “**God the Son**”), sitting to the right of “**The LORD**” (who is “**God the Father**”, [**the Creator**]), whereas Psalms 110:5 speaks of “**the Lord**” (**Jesus** [**“God the Son”**]) present at the right side of the subject being

spoken of, namely, “**the Lord**” (Jesus [“**God the Son**”]). In other words, in past times, “**the Lord**” was at the right hand side of “**the Lord**”, which is clearly an absurd statement!

While there is nothing in the Hebrew language of this verse to positively indicate that King David was referring to יהוה when he wrote אֲדֹנָי, “my lord” (or “my master”), in principle, there is no problem with David realizing that יהוה will be greater than he is. Moreover, there is nothing in David's words to indicate that the individual to whom he refers as “my lord” (or “my master”) is a divine being. If he authored this psalm, David refers to himself in the 3rd-person for someone else to chant about him. If the author was someone other than David, he is referring to King David. Nothing in the text of this psalm supports the Christian claim that אֲדֹנָי refers to Jesus.

Who is speaking to whom in Psalms 110:1? The analysis demonstrates that the Christian interpretation of “God the Father” addressing “God the Son” (Jesus) falls apart, while any of the Jewish interpretations mentioned above is plausible. It definitely cannot be Jesus relating what God said to him, yet it could be King David relating what God had promised him (in response to his pleas in Psalms 109). Or, perhaps, an anonymous author from the king's court speaking about the promises God made to his master, King David.

C. The Probable Origin of the Christian Mistranslation in Psalms 110:1

It is an interesting exercise to trace back in time this mistranslation in the KJV and other popular Christian Bibles to its possible source. The manner in which some ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible render the pair of terms אֲדֹנָי־יהוה in Psalms 110:1 provides valuable clues. Table IV.B-3 shows three such ancient translations.

Table IV.B-3 – Ancient translations and the terms אֲדֹנָי־יהוה from Psalms 110:1

Source	Language	Terms	Transliteration	Translation (in context)
Targum Yonathan	Aramaic	(1) אֲדֹנָי	L YHVH	[Said] the Lord [in words] to me , [master over all of Israel]
Christian LXX ⁽²⁾	Greek	<i>ο κυριος/κυριω μου</i>	<i>ο kurios/kurio mou</i>	[Said] The LORD [to] my Lord
Jerome's Vulgate ⁽²⁾	Latin	<i>Dominus/Domino meo</i>	(as shown in Latin)	[Spoke] The LORD [to] my Lord

(1) אֲדֹנָי is a common (non-sacred) notation used in place of the (sacred) יהוה

(2) In both the Christian LXX and Jerome's Latin Vulgate it is Psalms 109:1

The alleged "quotations" of Psalms 110:1 in the Greek language of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all have the same usage that appears in the Christian LXX. Upon reading the relevant passages in the Gospels, the source of the problem – the erroneous translations in Christian Bibles – is discovered. Two separate and distinct Hebrew terms, יהוה and

אֲדֹנָי, generate the same Greek term, **κύριος** (*kurios*), and thereby the distinction is erased. In other words, each Gospel's rendition utilizes the same Greek word κύριος (*kurios*), **lord/master**, twice in the same verse. In the Greek text, the first occurrence of **κύριος** (*kurios*) [actually, **ὁ κύριος** (**o kurios**)], is the translation of יהוה, and the second **κύριος** (*kurios*) [actually, **κύριω μου** (*kurio mou*)], is the (mis)translation of לַאֲדֹנָי, of which אֲדֹנָי is a component. Since the Christian LXX utilizes solely the lower-case Greek alphabet, the exegetical problems to which the Gospels' Jesus refers are apparent only in the Greek rendition. Subsequently, these issues propagated into translations made from the Greek.

The confusion that resulted from this problem in the Greek text does not exist in the Hebrew text and, therefore, Jesus' discourse is only possible if he and those with whom he spoke were conversing in Greek. His exegesis in the Gospels is non-existent in the Hebrew, and it is flawed in its understanding of the Greek rendition. Christian translators have seized on this ambiguity and separated the two instances to correspond to Christian theology. The **ὁ κύριος** (**o kurios**) becomes "The LORD", a reference to "God the Father", the Creator; and the **κύριω μου** (*kurio mou*) becomes "my Lord", a reference to "God the Son", Jesus, the messiah of Christianity.

This analysis clearly demonstrates that the Christian rendition with its imputed Christological implications cannot be valid.

D. Can One Find the Trinity in Psalms 110:1?

Christian missionaries also claim that Psalms 110:1 supports the Doctrine of the Trinity. The salient question is: "*From a Christian perspective, does the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, rendered "The LORD" in the KJV (and in many other Christian translations), refer to "God the Father", or to "God the Son", or to the full Trinity?"*

To help put this claim into its proper perspective, consider the **Sh^eMA**, often regarded as the "creed" of Judaism (the relevant highlighted Hebrew words are shown under their respective English version):

Deuteronomy 6:4 - Hear, O Israel; the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.
 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

The Hebrew term אֱלֹהֵינוּ (*Eloheinu*), **our God**, is the 1st-person, plural inflexion of אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*), **God**. Christian missionaries maintain that the Hebrew term אֱלֹהִים is plural and should be understood in its literal sense as "gods", thereby reflecting a plurality, alluding to the Trinity. Using this line of reasoning, the (translated) **Sh^eMA** should be interpreted as:

Hear, O Israel; the Lord is our gods, the Lord is a compound unity.

This distorted form of the **Sh^eMA** leads to the conclusion that the expression, “the Lord” [יהוה], can refer to neither “God the Father” nor “God the Son” individually. Rather, it must refer to all three members of the Trinity at once. Therefore, this would invalidate the Christian claim that the phrase “unto my Lord” of Psalms 110:1 in the KJV refers to Jesus! If the expression “my Lord” in the KJV translation of Psalms 110:1 refers to Jesus (the second member of the Trinity), then who is “The LORD” at the beginning of Psalms 110:1? Because, if “the Lord” [יהוה] in the "modified" **Sh^eMA**, i.e., "the Lord (who is) our gods", were a Trinity united in the divine name, then “The LORD” in the KJV rendition of Psalms 110:1 would also have to refer to this Trinity. However, if this were the case, then the phrase “unto my Lord” in the KJV rendition of Psalms 110:1 would automatically exclude Jesus, who would have already been included in the first part of the verse, “The LORD”.

Another curious issue is created by the attempt to retrofit the Trinity into Psalms 110:1. If “my Lord” (allegedly Jesus) is sitting next to “The LORD”, who represents the triune godhead or any aggregate of it, then Jesus cannot be part of it, since that which exists outside of God cannot be God. And, lastly, *where is the third component of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, in all of this?*

V. WHAT WAS BEING SAID BY THE SPEAKER?

As noted in Section III.A, Psalms 110:4 is used by Christian missionaries as a "proof text" to claim that Jesus is both king (Messiah) and high priest, as Melchizedek was. This idea supplants the Aaronic priesthood with a new and superior priesthood, the priesthood according to Melchizedek. To support this claim, passages such as the following, are cited:

Hebrews 7:3(KJV) - Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Hebrews 7:21(KJV) - (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

Has the Melchizedek Priesthood Replaced Israel's Aaronic Priesthood? In order to answer this question, it is important to note that, at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the material that comprises the New Testament did not exist; it was written over a period of many years, starting at least a decade after the event. The Scripture in force at that time was the Hebrew Bible. An analysis of the texts reveals that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews took editorial liberties in transforming material from the extant Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible into the message he was developing for his readers.

A term of interest is כֹּהֵן (**KOHEN**), which, in its most common usage in the Hebrew Bible, is correctly translated as a **priest**. However, the literal English

translation of כֹּהֵן as “a priest” at Psalms 110:4 is subject to challenge for several reasons. First, according to the Hebrew Bible, the plan for Israel is one that separates the functions of kingship and priesthood; an idea that is similar to the concept known today as the “separation of church and state”. The selection process, qualifications, and duties of the king – the political leader – are defined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Commencing with King David (2Samuel 7:12-16), the requirement was that kings of the Davidic dynasty had to come from the Tribe of Judah and be biological descendants of King David through King Solomon. Deuteronomy 18:1-8, the passage that immediately follows the passage about a king of Israel, describes the other category of leadership, the Priests and Levites – the spiritual leaders – who must all come from the Tribe of Levi.

Clearly, according to the Torah, the leadership positions of king and priest are mutually exclusive. In other words, in Israel, a king cannot be a priest, and a priest cannot be a king, and this is evident from the following passage:

Leviticus 4:22-26 – (22) When a ruler [of Israel] sins; and, without intention, does one of the commandments of the Lord his God which may not be done, and he incurs guilt; (23) Or if he is informed of his sin that he has sinned; then he shall bring his offering, a male goat without blemish; (24) And he shall lay his hand firmly upon the head of the goat, and slaughter it in the place where he would slaughter the burnt offering before the Lord; it is a sin offering. (25) And the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and place [it] upon the horns of the altar [used] for burnt offerings; and [the remainder of] its blood he shall pour out onto the base of the altar [used] for burnt offerings. (26) And all its fat he shall burn upon the altar as the fat of the peace offering; and the priest shall make atonement for his [the ruler's] sin, and he will be forgiven.

This passage, which describes the sin-offering ritual for a king, shows that the king is subservient to the priest, just as any commoner is, in the performance of this ritual. A king is barred from certain functions performed by a priest.

Second, the term כֹּהֵן [plural, כֹּהֲנִים (*kohanim*)], in addition to its common usage in the Hebrew Bible in identifying individuals who are **ministering as priests**, is also applicable to people who are **serving in an official [ruling] capacity**, and is occasionally used in this context in the Hebrew Bible and, as the following examples demonstrate, even correctly translated in the KJV (the relevant Hebrew terms are shown in brackets):

2Samuel 8:18(KJV) - And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief rulers [כֹּהֲנִים].

2Samuel 20:26(KJV) - And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler [כֹּהֵן] about David.

1Kings 4:5(KJV) - And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer [כֹּהֵן], and the king's friend:

Moreover, several accounts in the Hebrew Bible record King David as having performed some functions that were typically performed by priests:

2Samuel 6:14,17 – (14) And David danced with all his might before the Lord; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

(17) And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

This, too, will be the case with the awaited מְשִׁיחַ during his reign:⁹

Ezekiel 45:17 - And on the Prince shall be [the responsibility to bring] the burnt offerings, and meal offerings, and drink offerings, on the Festivals, and the New Moons, and the Sabbaths, on all the appointed times of the House of Israel; he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meal offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offering, to atone for the House of Israel.

Ezekiel 46:12 - And when the Prince shall prepare a free-will offering, a burnt offering or a peace offering as a free-will offering to the Lord, one shall open the gate that faces east, and he shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offering as he does on the Sabbath day; and he shall exit, and one shall close the gate after he has left.

Neither מְלֶכִי־צֶדֶק nor King David were a part of the Aaronic priesthood, and the Hebrew Bible rules out the possibility of having a valid priestly order outside of the Aaronic priesthood. Any priesthood that predates Levi, the son of Jacob/Israel and progenitor of the priestly Tribe of Levi, remains outside the realm of Judaism, because the priesthood that emerged out of Levi has been established for eternity:

Exodus 40:15 - And you shall anoint them [Aaron's sons], as you anointed their father, and they shall serve [as priests] unto Me; and their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.

Numbers 25:12-13 – (12) Therefore say, "Behold, I give him [to Phineas] My covenant of peace; (13) And it shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of an eternal priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and atoned for the Children of Israel.

Consequently, the references in the Epistle to the Hebrews to Jesus being "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" are irrelevant to Psalms 110 in particular, and to Judaism in general.

Another term of interest is the title מְלֶכִי־צֶדֶק (*malki-tsedeq*), **King of Righteousness**, a title that appears twice in the Hebrew Bible – at Psalms 110:4 and at Genesis 14:18:

Genesis 14:18 - And Malki-Tzedeq [מְלֶכִי־צֶדֶק], king of Shalem, brought out bread and wine; and he is a priest of the Most High God.

The title מְלֶכִי־צֶדֶק was traditionally borne by all kings of Jerusalem, such as the righteous Gentile priest-king of Abram's time, who worshipped the "One True God", even before the city had that name and was still called by its earlier name שְׁלֵם (*Shalem*), which is why King David is called by it in Psalms 110:4.^{10,11}

⁹ The identity of the "Prince" in the following passages is investigated in the essay, *Ezekiel 40-48 - "The Prince" of Ezekiel: Who Is He?* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/EzekielPrince.pdf>

¹⁰ The one who bore the title *Malki-Tsedeq* to whom Abram paid a tithe (Genesis 14:20), was – according to Jewish tradition – Noah's son Shem, who was still alive and actually outlived

Using the most common interpretation, that the psalm is about King David, Psalms 110:4 confirms that David's dynasty will last forever, and that he and his successors would also perform certain priestly functions, albeit not of the same standing as Aaron and his descendants, the כֹּהֲנִים, perhaps symbolizing the ideal for a Jewish king – that he should be like a priest, drawing the Jewish people closer to God.

Finally, there is the claim by Christian missionaries that the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood of Israel because Melchizedek conferred a blessing on Abraham. They maintain that, through this act, Melchizedek also blessed Levi, one of Abraham's great-grandsons. A careful reading of the actual passage reveals the flaw in this notion. While it is, indeed, מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק who was acknowledged as a priest-king of the "... **Most High God ...**" (Genesis 14:18), the person who "... **gave him a tenth of all ...**" (Genesis 14:22), i.e., the one who tithed him, was Abram, not Abraham. The significant point here is that the tithing took place prior to Abram's name being changed to Abraham and his formal entry into Hebrew monotheism via the Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:5-14). In other words, since Abram was a Gentile at the time he received the blessing from מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק, the claim that Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to Aaron's priesthood has no basis in the Hebrew Bible. The two priesthoods are independent priesthoods – Melchizedek's for Gentiles and Aaron's for Jewish people.

VI. SUMMARY

The analysis of Psalms 110 demonstrates that Christian missionary claims concerning this important component in their portfolio of "proof texts" are rooted in mistranslations and misinterpretations that have no valid basis within the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, since the Christian perspective is based on mistranslations and on concepts that are not part of the Hebrew Bible, it is inconsistent with any of the Jewish interpretations.

Even though several different Jewish interpretations of Psalms 110 exist, all can be validated vis-à-vis the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, the common Christian interpretation of this psalm, with its imputed Christology, falls apart under rigorous scrutiny. Not only can Jesus not be the one described as sitting to the right of God and qualify as the promised Jewish King/Messiah, this priesthood "**after the order of Melchisedec**", which appears to have been conferred on him by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is a self-defeating argument, since Melchizedek was a Gentile, not a Jewish, priest.

Abram/Abraham by 35 years (as can be calculated from Genesis 11). (Gratefully acknowledged is the input on this subject by Professor Mordochai Ben-Tziyyon, formerly of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel.)

¹¹ Also present in the Hebrew Bible, at Joshua 10:1,3, is a related, but not identical, name/title, אֲדֹנֵי־צֶדֶק (*adoni-tsedeq*), **lord/master of righteousness**, the King of Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

- If Jesus was a Jew, then he cannot be a priest in a priestly order that is outside of Judaism, such as the Melchizedek priesthood, since the Aaronic priesthood was established exclusively and eternally for his descendants, who would all be of the Tribe of Levi, to serve on behalf of Israel.
- If Jesus was a Jew and, as is claimed in the New Testament, ‘the son of David’, he would have to be of the Tribe of Judah. Therefore he cannot be of the Tribe of Levi and serve under the eternal covenant with Aaron and his descendants.
- If, on the other hand, Jesus was not a Jew, then, according to Torah, he cannot rule as king of Israel.

Case closed!

