

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Breaking the Spell of Tradition

This is a rather lengthy article. I ask for your patience. It has to do with the critical issue of the definition of God and His Son. I hope that our readers will take it to heart. The subject matter is vital to healthy worship of God “in spirit and truth” — the form of worship God requires and approves (John 4:24). I have written with both “lay” and more academically minded readers in mind. The point of the article is a simple one: Churches are hiding from their congregations the simple fact that God is one Person, the Father, and that Jesus is the human Lord *Messiah*.

This easy, unifying truth permeates the biblical writings and gives coherence to the whole Christian story as revealed in the Bible. As believers in Jesus and God and the great plan of Gospel-Kingdom Restoration, Bible readers are unfortunately divided by denominational barriers. More seriously, we can become alienated from Jesus and the Bible in certain ways. The most threatening of these is “tradition.” Unexamined tradition is the “bogeyman” in theology and church. Jesus accused the church establishment of his day of promoting tradition over Scripture (Mark 7:7). He reprimanded the Pharisees for burdening the people with an exhausting form of legalism, which produced a debilitating self-righteousness.

He indicted the Sadducees for being mistaken about so easy a doctrine as resurrection (which they denied) (Acts 23:8). Jesus detected their failure by telling them straightforwardly that they were “in error *not knowing the Scriptures*” (Matt. 22:29). He then put them right, teaching them that without a resurrection in the future for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God could not be “the God of the living” which He had claimed to be (Matt. 22:32). Today the widespread concept that the dead have departed to be with God *apart from the future resurrection* (1 Cor. 15:23) would attract the same criticism from Jesus.

In our time reports from observers of the church inform us that entertainment often submerges real learning. Singing should be indeed a *part* of worship, but far ahead of it comes instruction. How many bands, guitars or drums did Paul have when he instructed the people from dawn till dusk about the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 28:23, 31)? We can deceive ourselves by calling the singing part of church “the worship service.” Worship however in the Bible is not confined to singing and praying. It has to do with our whole lives which are supposed to be “our service of the word

[Gospel]” (Rom. 12:1). Service and worship are the same thing.

We are to know Scripture and not risk the awful prospect of being “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). In Isaiah 5:13 the captivity of Israel was caused by “lack of knowledge.” Clearly God expects us to know. The Messiah came to save by his death *and* “by his knowledge he makes many righteous” (Isa. 53:11). Jesus came to give us *understanding* (1 John 5:20). The Greek word is the most intellectual word available.

How very perceptive F.F. Bruce was when he wrote: “People who adhere to belief in the Bible only (as they believe) often adhere in fact to a traditional school of interpretation of *sola scriptura* [‘the Bible alone is our authority’]. Evangelical Protestants can be just as much *servants of tradition* as Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox, only they don’t realize that it is tradition.”<sup>1</sup> This is a salutary warning for us all from the “dean” of evangelical Protestants, widely acclaimed for his scholarship and balanced understanding of the Bible.

The rabbi Jesus is the one we claim as our leader in every respect. Not only did he die for us, but he asks us to submit to his *teaching* as the vehicle for essential worship of God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). We are urged by Jesus to love him as rabbi and lord (John 13:13). Just as the “eyes of the LORD range over the entire earth, to give support to those who are wholeheartedly with Him” (2 Chron. 16:9), so too God is seeking those who will “worship Him in the spirit and truth” (John 4:24). So important was truth that Paul could say of the hard-hearted, “because *the love of the truth* they did not welcome in order to be saved,” God gave those unbelievers over to a deluding energy so that they would believe falsehood (2 Thess. 2:10-11).

Sometimes tradition even gets built into the very fabric of the Bible text, due to translators’ bias in favor of received “orthodox” teaching. A most fascinating and revealing case of this occurs in connection with the Psalm which Jesus and all the NT used for defining who Jesus is in relation to his Father. I am referring to Psalm 110:1 which is cited and alluded to in the NT more often than any text from the OT. There are some 23 references to it. This Psalm was a favorite of Jesus. It formed the subject of his last words to the Pharisees. All three gospels record him quoting it, and with it silencing the misguided opposition and ignorance of the religious establishment of his day. With Psalm 110:1 Jesus put an

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence, June, 1981.

end to all controversy. This has not stopped tradition, however, from destroying the essential meaning of David's inspired utterance in Psalm 110:1.

No text from the Old Testament gets anything like the "press" that this verse receives in our Greek Scriptures. At the close of his ministry, in the last week of Jesus' life, we read the account of the most amazing of all Q and A sessions. Firstly the Pharisees, the "fundamentalists" of the day, since they claimed to adhere to all of Scripture, asked Jesus about paying taxes, hoping to incriminate him for any misplaced (as they judged it to be) loyalty to Caesar.

Jesus parried of course with a concise reply, to the effect that we are to give the government its lawful due and to serve God at the same time. Next the Sadducees, who denied the fundamental doctrine of resurrection and denied the existence of angels and evil spirits (as is found among some even today), tried to trick Jesus by positing a foolish scenario. It would be impossible to know who was married to whom in the resurrection, if a woman had had seven mates, due to second or third, etc. marriages. Jesus cleverly deflected their malice by showing that marriage as we know it now is not a factor in the lives of those who are counted worthy to inherit, as immortals, the future Kingdom of God on earth (Matt. 22:30; cp. Acts 13:46). Lastly Jesus was confronted with a question about the Great Commandment, and he responded by combining the biblical creed, the "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is *one* Lord" (not two or three!) of Deuteronomy 6:4 with the call to love that One God and our neighbor.

Now it was time for Jesus to wrap up the Q and A session with his own question. Towering above his hostile audience and endowed with the very wisdom of God, he chose the inspired oracle recorded in Psalm 110:1 which the early Christian community loved, not only for its own sublime and concise truth, but also because their rabbi Jesus used it to such good effect, silencing all opposition to his claims. The line in question is described as a prophetic and inspired "oracle of Yahweh to my lord" (David "spoke in spirit," Jesus said): "**The LORD said to my lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.'**"

Nothing could be more brilliantly spoken than these words of God through the prophet and patriarch David. The LORD (Yahweh in the Hebrew) of course was the personal name of the one God, a Divine Person, of the unitary monotheism of Scripture. Yahweh was named almost 7,000 times in the Hebrew Bible. That one LORD GOD, through David, utters this prediction of the Messiah. Both Jesus and his opponents, we know, recognized this as a supremely important prophecy of the promised Messiah. Psalm 110:1 was the crowning Messianic Psalm.

Jesus of course constantly makes the claim, particularly among his followers, to be the Messiah, and thus obviously his own career was outlined in the prediction of Psalm 110:1. He was destined as "son of David," the strong Messianic title and one which Jesus fully supported, to sit at the right hand in a glorious and supreme position of authority next to God, until the time came for him to defeat his enemies, at his future coming.

The telling question put by Jesus was this: Who is this person who was to be both son of David and *lord* of David? The question proceeding from an astute teacher to potential disciples directed their minds to sort out the apparent paradox of a person being *both* son, subordinate, *and* lord, a superior, of David the king. The answer is not hard for us, looking back. The Son of God had been designated as such by Luke 1:35, as the miraculously begotten child of Mary, and he was now designated "the lord," that is, "the Lord Messiah" at the right hand of the Father. At his ascension he was confirmed as **this "lord" in the sense declared by the astonishing proposition of Psalm 110:1: "The LORD said to my lord..."**

Tradition has done its "dirty work" on the transmission of this verse to us in various translations. Under the mistaken notion that Jesus and the New Testament writers must have been good orthodox believers according to the standards of much later church councils (Nicea, 325 AD and Chalcedon, 451 AD), a capital letter has appeared on the second "Lord" in this verse. At the same time it has been a convention amongst translators that "Lord" written with a capital "L" indicates that the underlying word in the Hebrew text is ADONAI ("adon-eye," rhyming with El Shaddai). But if that were so, God (the LORD) would be speaking to the Lord God! That would make two Gods! Biblical monotheism would be shattered.

The actual Hebrew word for the second "lord" in the Hebrew of Psalm 110:1 is not ADONAI (=Lord God, all 449 times in the OT), but a deliberately different form of the word, ADONI ("adonee"). This form of the word appears no less than 195 times in the OT, and it is reserved for superiors who are *not* God, but human (or occasionally an angel). The difference between *Adonai* (the supreme Lord God) and *adoni* (non-Deity lord) is critically important for the writers of Scripture, since knowing who God is and is *not* is the core question of all intelligent worship and service of God.

In the KJV version of 1611 readers were given the impression, because of the capital L on the second lord, "my Lord," that the Messiah so designated was GOD, as a second member of the Trinity. This impression is false at its very heart. The error of the capital was caught and corrected in the next major translation of the Bible which was done by the top scholars of the day in 1881. It was called the Revised Version. In that translation we

read “The Lord said to my lord,” and the truth about the identity of the Messiah is preserved. He is the human lord (*adoni*), not the Lord God (*Adonai*).

The interesting fact is that the KJV translators faithfully rendered *adoni* as “lord” (no capital) in the many other places where *adoni* occurred, and did not put a capital letter on “Lord” when the Hebrew word was *adoni*. But there were two exceptions. Here they broke their own rules. One was in Psalm 110:1 where *adoni* (my lord) was given the wrong translation “my Lord,” and the same mistake occurred in one other place: Daniel 12:8, where the angel, addressed as *adoni* (my lord), was somehow changed into God by the KJV scholars who wrote “Lord” and not “lord” (the RV corrected the error and wrote “lord”). The translators of the King James thus violated their own editorial rules in Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 12:8. The text in Psalm 110:1 was then read to mean “the LORD GOD said to my Lord GOD,” the Messiah. This gave (and gives) the reader the false impression that at least two members of a Trinity were in view.

The whole point of the New Testament based on this Psalm 110 and the entire prophetic testimony of the Hebrew Bible is that the Messiah was to be a *member of the human race, not a visitor from another sphere of conscious existence*, who “dressed up” as a human person for the purposes of a short residence on earth. The “doubling” of God, an impression created by the persistent capital letter on the second “lord” of Psalm 110:1, has caused untold confusion and strife. Jews are naturally deeply offended by the mistranslation of the Hebrew text of which they are the custodians (Rom. 3:2; Luke 24:44), making *adoni* into *Adonai*, or lord into Lord, and Muslims are likewise troubled.

A giant step towards a healthier dialogue between the great world religions will be immediately possible once this error of translation and editorial practice is recognized and corrected. Happily the translations of the Revised Version family, the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version, correctly tell us that the second lord in Psalm 110:1 is not “the Lord God” (*Adonai*). They put no capital on “lord.” The Basic Bible in English (BBE) is likewise true to the original and does not try to turn Jesus the Messiah into God, by giving the false impression that he is called Lord God in Psalm 110:1. The Roman Catholic version (NAB, New American Bible) and the Jewish Publication Society translation are also honest with the text by writing “my lord” and not “my Lord.” So is the British New English Bible and its revision, the REB, and also Moffatt.

One of the most blatant effects of the confusion over God and man appears in the margin of some editions of the New American Standard Version. Not only is the second lord capitalized in Psalm 110:1 but when Peter quotes our precious verse in Acts 2:34, a marginal note

to this verse states “The Hebrew in Ps. 110:1 is *Adonai*.” This is simply an unaccountable mistake, and it perpetuates the obscuring of the true nature of the Messiah as the human Son of God, not a second Person who is equally God, in a Trinity.

The public may have a hard time getting at the facts here. But understanding is to be sought for as silver and gold! The Hebrew lexicon from Oxford, the standard tool of scholars, the famous Brown, Driver and Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* carefully lists the meaning of “my lord” (*adoni*) in its 195 appearances in the Bible. Firstly the lexicon tells us that *adoni*, my lord, is used “**in reference to men**” of various categories: “master,” “husband,” “prophet,” “prince,” “king” (75 times in the books of Samuel and Kings), “father,” “Moses,” “prince,” “theophanic [appearing as representing God] angel,” “captain,” “general recognition of superiority.” Then the lexicon contrasts this with the word ADONAI, telling us correctly that this word “is a reference to God” (p. 11).

Had translators rendered *adoni* correctly in Psalm 110:1 and not put a capital letter on it to give the impression that the Hebrew was *Adonai* (Lord God), there would have been no argument about the relationship of Jesus to God. Jesus is the supremely exalted human being, the man Messiah, David’s lord, and hence the “my lord” or “our lord Jesus Christ” of the New Testament. David the king had also been addressed on occasion as “our lord King David” and often as “my lord.” This is the perfect Messianic royal title, which exactly fits Jesus’ identity. **The one category to which *adoni* (my lord) never applies is the Lord God.** The notion, therefore, that Jesus *is* God not only makes two who are God (the Father and Jesus) but violates and corrupts the controlling text defining the status of the risen Christ.

No wonder then that Peter in his rousing sermon in Acts 2 deliberately and expressly quotes the words of Psalm 110:1 to define the position of the risen Jesus who is now at the right hand of the One God. Peter’s announcement is no less informative for us today: “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The LORD said to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:34-35). Jesus’ entitlement to the name “lord” is based then on Psalm 110:1. Peter no doubt remembered Jesus using that very Psalm to establish his right to Messiahship. But no one imagined that Jesus had been made “God and Messiah.” The Psalm said nothing of the sort, and anyway you cannot *make* a person God! God has no beginning. The Son of God had a clear begetting or beginning in history (Matt. 1:18: “origin”; 1:20: “begotten,” and Luke 1:35).

It is widely acknowledged that the title “lord” for Jesus in the NT is derived from that inspired utterance of David. Jesus noted that it was supernaturally under the influence of the spirit that David said that YHVH had spoken to “my lord” (*adoni*). Paul echoes this thought when he says that “no one can say ‘Jesus is lord’ except by the spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). The sense in which “lord” is used of Jesus is **governed by Psalm 110:1**.

What Paul meant by “lord” goes back to the most ancient of titles, preserved in Aramaic in our Greek New Testament. This is *maranatha*, which means “may our lord come.” Paul constantly refers to Jesus as “my lord” and “our lord” and these are his proper Messianic titles based on Psalm 110:1. It is only when all the enemies of Jesus, the lord Messiah, are “put under his feet” (referring again to Ps. 110:1) that everything is submitted to the one God, the Father, so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). Dr. Colin Brown explains all this well for us in his section of the article on “lord” in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*: “The synoptic [Matthew, Mark, Luke] accounts of the discussion of the lordship of David’s son imply that this use of the title [lord] went back to Jesus himself (Matt. 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41, 44, cp. Ps. 110:1). How can David speak of *another* lord as if he is his son? The question is presented as a dilemma to the Jewish teachers. The context in Matthew and Mark intensifies this dilemma by recording it immediately after the question of the great commandment (Matt. 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34). Here the great commandment is defined as loving ‘the Lord your God’ with the whole of your being. Thus in reply to the Jewish teachers’ question about the Great Commandment, Jesus declares that the *Kurios* (Lord God) is to be given complete and undivided attention. But then Jesus puts to them the question of **this other lord** with its implied claims: ‘David himself calls him lord; so how is he his son?’ This question marks the climax of Jesus’ encounters with the Jewish religious teachers and leaders. Their failure to respond positively to this challenge marked the point of no return” (pp. 515, 516).

There is a direct line leading from the celebrated Psalm 110:1 to Jesus who claims the position of Messiah and lord. Peter quotes the same Psalm 110:1 to prove who Jesus is at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36). Paul takes up the same truth and has Jesus as that “other lord” who hands over the restored Kingdom to God, so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). The confirmation of Jesus’ lordship is derived from the inspired utterance of David about his “lord.”

The vital importance of this Psalm is affirmed by the standard authority appealed to by all scholarship, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Kittel.

After reminding us that Jesus in the Great Commission declared that the Father had given him all authority in heaven and on earth, the dictionary says rightly that such a person is lord! “This lordship is brought out especially in the use of Psalm 110:1. This verse is the only basis for the idea of session at the right hand of God. There is no other reference. In this psalm session is linked with lordship and especially with being David’s lord. With the word ‘therefore’ in Acts 2:36 Peter draws from this verse the deduction concerning Jesus. Session at the right hand of God means joint rule. This implies divine dignity, as does the very fact of sitting in God’s presence...The ascription of the name of Lord to Jesus is to be found in **the use which Jesus twice made of Psalm 110 in Mark 12:35 and 14:62, and parallels. We have already seen how strong was the influence of this psalm on the New Testament.** He who was David’s Lord is also Israel’s Lord and in **the** faith of the first community of Christians he is Lord of the new Israel. Perhaps the primitive Palestinian community did not go further than this...‘Our Lord’ would be the name of Jesus. This may be seen from the Aramaic word *maranatha* (**‘Our Lord come’**) which occurs twice in early Christianity (1 Cor. 16:22 and Didache 10:6 [an early post-biblical writing])...The Father had committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22; Matt. 28:18). If the word Lord (*kurios*) expressed all this, the Septuagint [Greek version of the Old Testament] which spoke of the *kurios* could be referred to Jesus. In him God acts as is said of the Lord of the Old Testament.” That is exactly right. God was “in Christ” at work reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). This does not mean that Christ *is* God. He remains the man Messiah at the right hand of God, the one who is *adoni* and not *Adonai*. He is God’s supreme human agent.

**It is so important to emphasize that the foundation for the concept of Jesus as lord is Psalm 110:1.** And Jesus is the source of the usage of that verse (Matt. 22; Mark 12; Luke 20). The early Church followed Jesus in making Psalm 110:1 the key to his status next to God. It remains a baffling and worrying fact that in two current studies promoting the Trinity, this Psalm is not even mentioned! The overpowering demand to insist on Jesus *being God* rather than the Lord Messiah (Luke 2:11) forces commentators to ignore the spectacularly interesting definition and basis for Jesus as “lord” — that is the *adoni*, my lord, of Psalm 110:1.

Robert Morey produced an extensive defense of the Trinity in his *Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (1996), but he made no mention of Psalm 110:1, **which is the golden key to the position of Jesus next to God.** Robert Bowman in his *Why You Ought to Believe in the Trinity* omitted any reference to Psalm 110:1. In an

effort to refute the Jehovah's Witnesses (*Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses*) Ron Rhodes wrote of Psalm 110:1: "Here we have the first person of the Trinity speaking to the second person of the Trinity." This is quite wrong. In fact, it is impossible, as the Regius Professor of Church History at Oxford said in 1910 in the *International Critical Commentary*: "**We are not to suppose that the apostles identified Jesus with Yahweh: Psalm 110:1 made that impossible**" (p. 99).

Rhodes has not taken into account the word for "my lord" (*adoni*). He has not read the original to check his facts. He writes: "David's reference to 'my Lord' also points to the undiminished deity of the Messiah, since 'Lord' (Hebrew: *Adonai*) was a title for deity. The Messiah would be David's son but he would also be David's God. The Messiah would be both God *and* man. To drive this point home, Christ continued to interrogate the Pharisees: If David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (v. 45). The Pharisees were trapped and they knew it." Rhodes then seeks support from Dwight Pentecost in his *Word and Works of Jesus Christ*: "If the Pharisees answered that David called him his Lord because he is God, then they could not object to Christ." Rhodes is then certain of his conclusions. He continues: "Obviously far from showing that Christ is less than the Father, Psalm 110:1 **actually points to the undiminished deity of Jesus Christ**" (my emphasis). He then counsels his readers: "After explaining this to the Jehovah's Witnesses, ask them this: 'Did you know that the same word used for 'Lord' (*Adonai*) in Psalm 110:1 of Jesus Christ is also used of the Father numerous times in Scripture (Exod. 23:17; Deut. 10:17; Josh. 3:11)? Is it not clear from the context of Matt. 22 that Jesus' main point to the Pharisees was that the Messiah would be *David's son* as well as *David's God*?"

The argument, however, has backfired. The form **Adonai**, which everyone knows means the Lord God, is *not* the word David used to describe who the Messiah is! The facts are misreported and the argument is built on a false premise. The facts of the language of Psalm 110:1 prove actually what Rhodes and others are not keen to recognize: the Messiah is designated *not as Adonai* (Lord God) but *adoni*, the human lord. *Adoni*, the second lord of Psalm 110:1, is never a reference to God in any of its 195 occurrences! *Adoni* is, other than in this verse, correctly written by translators as "lord," not "Lord." But here in Psalm 110:1 the reader is misled, either by a factual misstatement or by an added capital letter, into thinking that Jesus is the Lord *God*. And this verse is the New Testament's "John 3:16," a golden text for defining who the Son of God, Messiah, is in relation to the one God.

Psalm 110:1 is simply "huge" in its importance as taking us right back to the mind of Christ himself. It is

he who launched the inquiry about David's lord and David's son. The status of Jesus next to God is carefully defined not as one of Deity (which would make two Gods!). Jesus is "my lord, the Messiah." He is the "our lord" of the Christian community. This is his royal status as Son of Man and Son of God. The Hebrew Bible sets the pattern for this wonderful royal title when it describes the king of Israel as "my lord, the king" some 50 times. David is referred to as "our lord King David" in 1 Kings 1:43, 47. Elizabeth visited "the mother of my lord" (Luke 1:43), and in John 20:13 Mary was deeply distressed because "they have taken away my lord and I do not know where they have laid him." Once again it is the royal, Messianic title from Psalm 110:1 which is key to the New Testament understanding of who Jesus is.

A massive study of early views of Jesus appeared in Larry Hurtado's 700-page tome, *Lord Jesus Christ* (2003). He nowhere discusses the meaning of the original Hebrew *adoni*, my lord, but he says: "Psalm 110 was one of the most important OT passages drawn upon by first century Christians in their efforts to understand and articulate Jesus' significance and to defend their convictions about him, especially perhaps among Jews" (p. 500). "The NT uses of this psalm clearly reflect the particular influence of the first verse of Ps. 110, where the Lord (Hebrew YHVH) invites another figure 'my lord' (Heb. *adoniy*) [on p. 183 he spells the word in the way it normally appears in transliteration, *adoni*] to sit at his 'right hand.' Numerous NT passages indicate that this poetic description of a divinely authorized coronation was taken as descriptive of Jesus' heavenly exaltation" (p. 501).

Some scholars have attempted to warn us that **Luke does not believe that Jesus was God**. "Luke's understanding [of who Jesus is] does not allow for any deification [making him God]. Jesus does not become other than what he was before. What happens is that Jesus' victory is achieved and that his status as Lord over all is accomplished. But Jesus himself remains as he was before, the individual Christ, **for Luke moves wholly within the sphere of Old Testament thought. It is this which fashions Luke's understanding at this point and more especially the ideas suggested by Ps. 110:1**...This does not mean that Jesus becomes God or that he is given a divine status by Luke. The psalmist calls both God and the king 'Lord' but *he does not give equality to the two*. In the same way, Luke sees Jesus as wholly subordinate to the Father, given a share in the Father's authority, but one which is derived from the Father. He is still the instrument of the Father and is still called his servant (Acts 3:26; 4:30)."<sup>2</sup>

The key point is this: "The speech of Peter in Acts is a careful explanation of how Christians can proclaim

<sup>2</sup> Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord*, pp. 53, 54.

that Jesus is both their Lord and the Lord over all. In Jesus the hopes of Psalm 110:1 are fulfilled **and Jesus is now Lord in the full sense that that psalm expected**" (p. 53).

And what sense was this? Jesus is *adoni*, the human lord Messiah, not *Adonai*, the Lord God! The enormous concentration given to this verse by the Bible has yet to create the revolution in our thinking which it ought to bring about! The Bible's Jesus is not God, but "my lord the King Messiah," the *adoni* of Psalm 110:1. That precious witness begins with the inspired words of David. It is affirmed in the final and climactic teaching of Jesus and then serves as an umbrella text for the rest of the New Testament. It is the antidote to a post-NT development which saw "Christology" (defining who the real Jesus is) go out of control.

Arthur Wainwright got it right: "The climax of Peter's speech is the announcement of Jesus' exaltation to the Messianic Lordship of Ps. 110:1 and not the Divine Lordship [i.e. of the later Trinity]."<sup>3</sup>

Almost the last verse of the whole Bible reports the cry of the church: "Even so, come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). And the individual to come is not the Lord God, but the Lord Messiah, the human Messiah, the supernaturally begotten Son of God (Luke 1:35) — not a second God of a triune Deity.

"There is no trace of controversy over who Jesus was in the first 50 years of the church's existence...In spite of the way in which Jesus was called Lord, and in spite of the tendency to transfer to him ideas and quotations which originally referred to Yahweh, it must **not be assumed** that he was openly and directly *identified with Yahweh*. Other passages stress the difference between Lord and God...The New Testament writers did not consistently *identify Christ with Yahweh*...Hence a distinction is made by Paul between the Lord Christ and God, the Father" (ref. to 1 Cor. 8:4-6).<sup>4</sup> Another scholar says rightly: "At this stage there are no indications that there was any confusion between the two Lords, or any attempt to claim Divinity for Jesus because he was called Lord."<sup>5</sup>

Oscar Cullmann, the famous Swiss NT scholar, was telling us in 1959 that the Hebrew word for Lord was "used both in the absolute sense of the Lord [God], as well as in the general sense of 'master' or 'owner'... The word is qualified by another noun or **suffix to indicate which lord is meant**."<sup>6</sup>

This is exactly our point. The suffix on the end of the word "lord" (adon-i) tells us whether God or man is meant. In Psalm 110:1 we have the dramatically

important evidence that New Testament Christians, following Jesus' own teaching, knew that the Messiah was "lord," not "the Lord God." He was David's *adoni* and certainly not David's *Adonai*! This simple fact about Psalm 110:1 has been hopelessly muddled firstly by the misreporting of the word *adoni* as *Adonai*, and secondly by the placing of the capital "L" on the second "lord," giving the false impression that the word was *Adonai*, Lord God.

The confusion over Lord God and Lord *Messiah* in turn led to the appalling, centuries-long argumentation which followed the NT times over the identity and status of Jesus in relation to the One God. Jesus was eventually and dogmatically turned into God. The information given us in Psalm 110:1 was turned on its head, and the whole intractable problem of the Trinity as the hallmark of a genuine believer was generated. This issue of who Jesus is continues today to provoke passionate emotional responses, along with cries of "heresy." Men have been burned at the stake or banished from the church for daring to say "Jesus is the Lord Messiah, but only the Father is God."

None of these disastrous theological wrangles would have been necessary had we paid attention to the defining language of Psalm 110:1. Characteristically, as a human race, and especially as members of a church establishment, we prefer our cherished traditions over the plain word of Scripture.

Until this muddle is resolved and the text of Psalm 110:1 is given its proper respect, Muslims will be asked to accept the idea of a triune Deity. Dr. Jim Packer admits that the Trinity "is perhaps the hardest concept that the human mind has ever been asked to grasp." Miriam Adeney, author of *Daughters of Islam*, remarked that "It took Christian theologians three centuries to find words to talk about it." Unconsciously she here concedes that the NT did not talk about it, since they had no words to do so!

Who said that the Bible intended to be "mysterious" or "beyond words" in its declaration of how many God is? The foggy language found in some attempts to justify a doctrine that Jesus did not recognize continues to provide a smokescreen, obscuring the simplicity of the unitarian monotheism of Jesus (Mark 12:29), and his own claim to be the unique agent of the One God, whom he declared to be "the only one who is truly God" (see John 17:3). That definition is not so hard! Augustine, promoting the Trinity, much later, was forced *to alter the order of the words* in John 17:3, inserting his triune idea into the matchless words of Jesus (see his *Homilies on John*). That of course was a violation of the Bible. Augustine was stumped by John 17:3 where Jesus defined his Father as "the only one who is truly God." Undaunted, Augustine wrote: "The proper order of the words is 'You [Father] and Jesus Christ whom you sent,

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the N.T.*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts*, p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> *The Christology of the NT*, p. 200.

the only true God.” Let the reader ponder this assault on the Bible.

Psalm 110:1 may yet have its day as the stimulus to a massive return to early Christian beliefs about God and Jesus. May that day come soon, and may Christians everywhere devote their attention to Psalm 110:1, as the golden key to confessing Jesus as Lord Messiah, and his Father as “the only one who is truly God”(John 17:3) or as “the only God” (John 5:44). In both these texts the Greek words cry out for intelligent reception. The Father of Jesus is the “*monos theos*” (“only God,” Jn. 5:44) and the “*monos alethenos (true) theos*” (“only true God,” John 17:3). This is the pure *mono-theism* of Jesus and the Bible.

There is no parallel in the history of the exposition of the Bible, I suppose, to the constant suppression of information by translation and commentary (translation is really a form of commentary!) in regard to that second lord of Psalm 110:1. It is a verse of vast importance to Jesus and to the writers of the New Covenant. It provides a lucidly simple and clear definition of Yahweh, the One God in relation to another person, the Messiah, who is not God, but the Lord Messiah. *Adoni, my lord*, provides the Messianic title for Jesus, *par excellence*. *Adoni* is the specifically non-Deity title. The proposition “Jesus is God” or “Jesus is Yahweh” is in direct contradiction to the inspired oracle of Psalm 110:1. As with the impassioned messages that run through the internet and our emails, tell this to your friends! It can be life-changing and eye-opening. May the discussion begin in earnest and may we all be seekers after truth, Bereans (Acts 17:11).

#### **Crucial Words from the Top Level of Scholarship**

**“We are not to suppose that the Apostles identified Jesus with Jehovah. There were passages which made this impossible, Ps 110:1. Mal. 3:1.”<sup>7</sup>** The Bible says that the Messiah is not YHVH. Thus the popular slogan “Jesus *is* God,” implied in the Trinitarian confessions of many churches, does not reflect Jesus or Scripture.

The Old Testament equally blocks the amazing idea that the Messiah would be God Himself. Professors of the top level have been telling us this for years! “An absolute predication of Godhead, even in the case of the Messiah, would be inconceivable in the Old Testament.”<sup>8</sup>

“The Messiah was a king of the royal line of David. He was therefore a flesh and blood human being, divinely appointed like all true Jewish kings but not

<sup>7</sup> Charles Bigg, DD, Canon of Christ Church and Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Oxford, *International Critical Commentary*, 1910, p. 99, 127.

<sup>8</sup> E. Kautzsch, *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Vol., p. 695.

divine nor angelic in any way. Even when accompanied by supernatural miracles...**he is still a human person.** Some Talmudic legends speak of the Messiah being ‘held in reserve’ in heaven or on earth, yet he is still a **mortal human being.**”<sup>9</sup>

And God dying would be just non-sense! What then of the popular seasonal celebration of the birth of the “baby God,” whose “diapers Mary changed.” Is this the best that evangelical scholarship can manage? “Angels watched as Mary changed God’s diaper” (Max Lucado). Or should churchgoers rise in protest? It is precisely this amazing concept that the atheists mock. Richard Dawkins, the contemporary voice of atheism, attacks what he thinks is Christianity. He says that Christians believe in “a God who got himself born.”

The God of the Bible cannot be born (brought into existence). He has no beginning and since he is immortal (I Tim. 6:16; 1:17), incapable of death — he cannot die! The Son of God died for the sins of the world. This alone ought to correct a long-held mistake about who God and Jesus are. In church, the hymn of Charles Wesley is repeated uncritically: “’Tis mystery all, the immortal died.” Is this not an abuse of the precious gift of language and logic?

The *Oxford Bible Commentary* makes exactly the right point about the vital importance of Psalm 110:1 “The Scriptural text that seemed best to epitomize that faith was ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’ This text is quoted more widely across the gamut of NT authors than any other — closely followed by ‘You are my Son; this day I have begotten you’ (Ps. 2:7), less precise but similar in its importance.”

May the public be alerted to the unfortunate mistake that appears in many standard sources, encouraging the confusion about who God and Jesus are. The *John MacArthur Study Bible* misreports: “The first word for ‘lord’ is Yahweh which is God’s covenant name. The second word for ‘lord’ is a different word which *the Jews used for God*” (my emphasis).

In a world divided and mutually hostile in its disagreement about who God is, the Bible ought to be allowed to exert its supreme authority and unite us in a single and easy concept: God is the God of Jesus and He is the God of Israel. He is not a triune God. This is a later attempt to explain the Bible in a foreign language, that of Greek philosophy. The attempt has not worked. God is not three “hypostases in one essence.” God is not “a What” in “three Who’s.” Not a single verse in the Bible tells us that God is an “essence” or a what.” Yet evangelical churches gather under that umbrella. ✧

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Wylen, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus*.

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## **2009 Theological Conference**

April 26-29, 2009

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Do make plans to be with us for the 18<sup>th</sup> annual conference. Your excitement over truth, your personal journey of faith is an enormous encouragement to others battling their way through the considerable difficulties of life (Acts 14:22!). We will offer you some fine presentations by experienced teachers. These can contribute to our mutual growth in grace and knowledge, an essential for our progress in the faith that leads to the future inheritance of the Kingdom. I believe that the insights God has graciously given us all represent an emergence of widely lost fundamental truths. These have been held by small “remnant” believers over the years but they have had to battle the massive opposition of mainline “orthodoxy” — which may not be quite as orthodox as is supposed. Let’s all come together in April to sharpen each others’ thinking and build one another up. It will be a time of rich fellowship as we learn together and remedy the difficult isolation which many today experience.