

## The Appealing Christology of King David

Because no formulated doctrine of the Trinity appears in Scripture, Trinitarian writers often represent the Apostles as struggling to become Trinitarians. One cannot help thinking that if the Old Testament were allowed its full weight in the discussion, this line of reasoning might have been abandoned. As it is, the important Christological foundation laid by the Hebrew Scriptures is curiously avoided and even sometimes misrepresented.

Psalm 110:1 is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament passage. As a divine oracle from Yahweh to David's Lord, it defines the status of the Messiah. Jesus shares with the Pharisees the Messianic interpretation and uses their common ground to challenge the authorities to follow David by acknowledging David's Son as Lord.<sup>1</sup> The oracle reveals that the Messiah is to be honored as "my Lord." An examination of this form of address shows that it occurs some 150 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is a combination of the word for Lord (*adon*) and the first person singular pronominal suffix. In this form the title is nowhere applied to the Deity but nearly always to human superiors, typically to the kings of Israel, and occasionally to angels.

*Adoni*, "my Lord," is of course to be differentiated from the word *adonai* which is invariably a title of the One God. The fact that *adoni* is the proper address to the human kings of Israel is of enormous significance for New Testament Christology. The Messiah was to be the supreme and unique agent of Yahweh but nevertheless a member of the human race. The "anointed one" could partake of divine spirit in full measure but he never posed a threat to monotheism.

The shift from understanding the Messiah as the ideal human superior to believing that he was part of the eternal Godhead could not have happened while the Church was still governed by the terms of the Messianic Christology provided by Psalm 110:1. Subsequent developments show that this Old Testament key to Christology was eventually rejected, once Greek metaphysical categories were brought to bear on the

Christological problem. This, however, did not happen within the New Testament which maintains unreservedly a belief in Jesus as Messiah.

The clear difference between *adonai* and *adoni* has not prevented commentators, even the most sophisticated, from unconsciously blurring the distinction between God and the Messiah. They seem not to have realized that "my Lord" is not a designation of Deity. Thus the writer of the article on Christology in the *Encyclopedia Americana*<sup>2</sup> states: "In Psalm 110:1, 'Jahweh said to Adonai: Sit thou at my right hand.' This passage is cited by Christ to prove that he is Adonai, seated at the right hand of Yahweh (Mat. 22:44). But Adonai, 'my master,' as a proper name, is used exclusively of the Deity, either alone or in such phrases as Jahweh Adonai; indeed, instead of the ineffable name, Jahweh, the pious Jew read Adonai. It is clear, then, that in this lyric, Jahweh addresses the Christ as a different Person and yet identical in Godhead."

However, the basis of the argument is false. Yahweh did not address the Christ as *adonai*, which is indeed a title exclusively for the Deity. The Christ is addressed as *adoni*, "my Lord," which is never a divine title in the Old Testament. The confusion seems to have become entrenched. Robert Sumner in a chapter entitled "What think ye of Christ?"<sup>3</sup> asserts that in Psalm 110:1 "King David called Christ 'my Lord,' using one of the names of deity, Adonai." From this evidence we are to deduce that the Messiah is the uncreated eternal Son of God.

The facts are not as stated. David, whose Christology Jesus declared to be impeccable, did not address the coming Messiah as *adonai* but as *adoni*, a title of honor fit for important human superiors, as distinct from *adonai*, the title reserved for the One God and Father. Howard Marshall comes to our rescue.<sup>4</sup> Commenting on Acts 2:34, 35 he notes that "there is an ambiguity in the English use of the word 'Lord' which is not present in the Hebrew Psalm [110] where the first word translated 'Lord' is YHWH, the name of God, and the second word is *adon* which can be used of human lords and masters. . . . Here [in Acts 2:34-36] it is simply the attribute of lordship which is given to Jesus; he is not equated with Yahweh."

The confusion over Psalm 110 has been perpetuated in the development of post-biblical, non-Messianic views of Jesus. We believe that the Hebrew Bible must save the Church from the inadequate vocabulary of

<sup>1</sup>Mat. 22:41-46.

<sup>2</sup>New York: Americana Corporation, 1949, Vol VI, 624.

<sup>3</sup>*Jesus Christ Is God*, Biblical Evangelism Press, 1983, 321.

<sup>4</sup>*Acts of the Apostles*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1986, 79, 80.

Neoplatonic philosophy which has imposed itself on traditional Christological affirmations. The first step in the process of restoration will be an accurate reading of the divine oracle given us through the lips of David. Christ is to be recognized as *adoni*, “my Lord Messiah, King of Israel”<sup>5</sup> and Savior of all who believe in Him through His message.

The purpose of *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* is to explore the theology and history of a tradition which invites Christians to read the Bible in its own Hebrew context. We add our voices to those who have protested against the confusing effects of Neoplatonism on the original faith. We think that the Bible is essentially a Hebrew book whose fundamental themes became increasingly obscure when Gentiles replaced Jews as leaders of the Church and the faith was reinterpreted in a Greek milieu. Christianity has largely forgotten that Jesus was a Jew. Consequently we have become estranged from the Messianic agenda which forms the framework of His whole mission.

In this issue we include a survey of early objectors to developing Trinitarianism. In the interests of apostolic eschatology we suggest that the book of Hebrews is governed by a thoroughly realistic view of the future, which expects salvation to come to the earth when the promises made to Abraham receive their final fulfillment. We then propose a hermeneutic of Premillennialism which allows for Paul’s inclusion of Gentiles in the “Israel of God.” Our concluding article investigates the calling of David to kingship over Israel.

*Anthony Buzzard*

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<sup>5</sup>Cp. Luke 2:11; Col. 3:24.