

## EDITORIAL

# Confusing the Lord God and the Lord Messiah

At a time when Christological speculation is bursting the bounds of propriety and common sense (Barbara Thiering now declares that Jesus was married, had several children and was divorced<sup>1</sup>), there is a need to restate the facts about what expectation the Hebrew Bible presents in regard to the identity of the promised Savior. A longstanding inaccuracy has plagued the discussion about who Christ is and needs to be cleared up.

A small booklet, entitled *The Deity of Jesus Christ*, by Professor V.A. Spence Little, makes a fundamental point about the identity of Jesus:

The striking passage in the opening verse of Psalm 110, “The Lord (Jehovah) saith unto My Lord (Adonai),” is confirmed as a designation of Christ by the Lord himself, when he said to a company of Pharisees, “David therefore calleth him Lord,” etc., as recorded in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42. The nature of the statements attributed to the Lord Jehovah, concerning a certain “Lord” or “My Lord,” are of sufficient importance in our argument to entitle this passage to further attention.

The contents of the first verse of this Psalm receive much prominence in various places in the New Testament. Beside their use by the Lord in reference to Himself, as referred to above, St. Peter cites this verse in his Pentecostal Sermon (Acts 2:34), upon which he makes the comment that “God made that same Jesus both Lord (Kurios, the Old Testament Septuagint title for Jehovah) and Messiah.”

Again the epistle to the Hebrews (1:13) cites this passage and applies it to Christ, whom this writer has just before addressed as “God.” And he again refers to the statement in the Psalm, “The Lord said unto My Lord, sit Thou on My right hand,” in the

comment, “This Man (Jesus) sat down on the right hand of God” (10:12), referring to the session of the ascended Lord. . . .

Whoever this Personage is who is described by so august titles and offices, as the Rod of Jehovah’s strength, and the deliverer come out of Zion, which St. Paul refers to in Romans (11:26), the Redeemer of Israel and Judge of the Gentile nations in preparation for the inauguration of God’s Kingdom on earth as referred to in the Revelation (19:11-16), at least this inference must be accepted that this Lord Adonai, both by nature and office, is acknowledged both in Psalm and in many New Testament interpretations thereof as a Divine Personage and on equality with Eternal Deity (e.g. Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1).

When Kurios of the Septuagint is applied to Christ, it is specially and directly explained in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 110:1, “The Lord (Jehovah) saith unto My Lord (Adonai), sit Thou at My right hand.” These words were quoted by the Lord with comments, by which He definitely implied that this divine Name, Adonai, indicated Himself (Matt. 22:43-45; Mark 12:36, 37).<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt about the supreme importance of Psalm 110:1 for New Testament Christology. Not only does Jesus declare himself to be the second Lord mentioned in the divine utterance (Matt. 22:43-45), but Peter confirms that Jesus has received at his ascension the office of Lord as defined by Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:23-34). This is obviously Christological truth on the highest authority. The question then is, what is meant by “Lord”?

It is amazing that commentators, for example the one cited above, misstated the facts about the language used to describe the Messiah. A whole tradition confidently asserts that Psalm 110:1 contained the word *Adonai*, the equivalent of Yahweh, as the proper title for the Messiah. The Hebrew word in question, however, is not *Adonai* at all, but *Adoni*, “my lord.” And *Adoni*, in its more than 150 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, never once refers to the Deity, but always to human (or occasionally angelic) superiors *other than God Himself*. *Adoni* is the favorite title for the king of Israel and is thus entirely appropriate as the Messianic address par excellence. The Messiah therefore is a man, not Deity.

<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 19.

<sup>2</sup> London: The Covenant Publishing Co., Ltd., 1956, 14, 15, 58.

By an extraordinary confusion, perpetuated by the misreading of *Adonai* for *Adoni*, Jesus has been declared the Lord *God* rather than the Lord *Messiah*. It is the latter title which he receives from the angels who announced to the shepherds that “today in the city of David there is born for you a savior who is the Lord Messiah” (Luke 2:11). When Jesus is called “Lord” the New Testament does not mean that he is Jehovah but a Lord distinct from the One Lord God. He is the Lord Christ or, more fully, “the Lord Jesus Christ.” There are indeed two lords, but the second is not Deity but the Son of God and Messiah. Jesus’ and Peter’s witnesses to Psalm 110:1 as the key to Jesus’ Lordship need urgent confirmation throughout the church which has long traded on a misunderstanding fostered by the confusion of two similar Hebrew words with vastly different meanings. The rediscovery of Psalm 110:1 as the basis of New Testament monotheism and Christology will help to put to an end centuries of metaphysical speculation which could not have occurred if the Hebrew Bible had been allowed a controlling hand in Christological definition.