

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Proclaiming Jesus as Christ and Lord: Peter's Use of Psalm 16 & Psalm 110 in His Pentecost Speech (Acts 2:25-35)

A research paper submitted to
Professor Anthony Selvaggio
for
COURSE NT21
Acts & the Epistles 1

In candidacy for the degree of
Master of Divinity

by
Grant Van Leuven

November 11, 2004

In Peter's Pentecostal Speech at the foundation of the early Church following Christ's royal ascension into heaven, he quotes two Psalms together in Acts 2:25-35. Peter uses these Psalms to prove Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and Kingly Lord, and exhorts his Jewish listeners to believe in Him for their salvation. The Psalms were what the Jews were familiar with, and their Messianic connection made by Peter with Jesus would be compelling; thousands would be saved that day. Why did Peter choose these particular Psalms to prove Christ? Calvin writes: "... at this time, God had provided His disciples with listeners who were godly men, prepared to learn. They sought the Messiah in the Old Testament. They knew that a type of Messiah was figured in David."¹ Let us first look at these Psalms in their own context to understand their Messianic import to Peter and the Jews.

Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28)

I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.

First, since this psalm has been questioned as to its authorship, it's important to demonstrate David wrote it (even though Peter does credit the psalm to David) by noting that the phrases used throughout echo other better-known Davidic hymns: vs 1-Pss 7:1; 11:1: "in you I take refuge"; vs 5-Ps11:6: "my portion, my cup"; vs 8 – 15:5; 10:6: "I shall not be moved" : v 9

¹ Jean Calvin, *Calvin's NT Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol.1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 69.

– 4:8 ‘dwell securely’; v 10-4:3: “your favored one”; v 11-17:7, 15; 21:6; 109:31: “at your right hand”; “joy of your presence”.²

Based on verse one, the psalmist is expressing the hope of not perishing, and staying close to God for protection: "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge."³ David is hopeful, thankful, and has resolve through his troubles in the Lord himself, for apart from Him he “has no good thing.” He proclaims his loyalty to God and rejoices in his personal relationship with him as his refuge, provider, counselor, and protector -- forever. Clearly, there is a predominant hope in eternity in this psalm, and not just a plea for relief from temporary earthly problems; verse 11 sums up this eternal hope: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

But this psalm, preoccupied with eternal pleasures at God’s right hand, must be talking about someone other than David himself; it prophesies about the Messiah. Our first hint of this is in verse 9 and 10: “... my body also will rest secure, you will not let your Holy One see decay.” This idea that he will not see decay is odd, because David knew from the prophet Nathan that he would die, be buried, and his sons would rule after him as his own body rotted away. While he does have hope in eternal pleasures for himself with God, his body would see decay. So this is where the Psalm shifts to the Messiah as subject. Calvin says the sense is that God will not suffer Him of whom the Psalm speaks to *rot* in the grave, and the Hebrew word used denotes corruption on the human body, a “condition of putrescence”.⁴ But David knew, and we know, that his body would see decay, so how can the one in the presence of God, at his right hand in fact, be corrupted? This can’t be referring to David, but the Seed of David promised to

² Walter C, Jr. Kaiser, “The promise to David in Psalm 16 and its application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (S 1980) : 223.

³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 5, Psalms, sec. 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 228.

⁴ Jean Calvin, *Calvin’s NT Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol.1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 68.

him to reign on his throne for eternity. And this King who reigns for eternity is the source of David's hope and certainty of a resurrection to everlasting peace in God's presence secured also for him.

Kaiser also points out how distinctive this Psalm is as referring to Jesus by use of the word *hāsîd*, *the Holy One*, or *the favorite one*: "...the reason this passage should ever have been linked to the Messiah along with the Davidic speaker rests on the proper understanding of the term *hāsîd*. As a messianic term, it is only surpassed by 'Servant of the Lord' and 'Messiah' in the OT."⁵ Psalm 16 is looking ahead in its last verses to David's Seed, Jesus the Anointed One as the subject -- the eternal fulfillment for David's hope to be in God's presence. Only the favorite one, the eternal King, could not see decay and be at God's right hand. And so Peter quotes this section of the Psalm to prove to the Jews that the risen Messiah had come in Jesus.

Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34, 35)

The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

David narrates God speaking to his Lord. Who is he speaking of here? It would be a strain to try and put David in as Lord, as he's speaking in the third person. Also, it's clear this conversation is in the heavenly realms, where David is not, but only the Messiah, God's own Son could be – especially at His right hand. Imagine if David thought of himself in this verse; it would be blasphemy, really, for David to presume to sit *along side* God ruling over the nations as equals. Only David's promised Seed could hold such an equal position of authority. No man can sit on God's throne and rule with Him – only God can in the person of His beloved Son.

⁵ Walter C, Jr. Kaiser, "The promise to David in Psalm 16 and its application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (S 1980) : 224.

MacArthur notes that “Placing one’s enemies under one’s feet was a figure of speech denoting their abject submission.”⁶ Only the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Holy One of Psalm 16, can receive such submission; in fact, as Calvin points out, “...when David died he left many enemies surviving him in various places.”⁷ But David’s eternal Seed who will not see decay on can claim such eternal, final victory over all the nations on the Last Day.

Barry C. David also points out that the Hebrew scriptures link *sit* and *right side* on only four occasions (1 Kings 2:19; 22:19; 2Chron. 18:18, Ps 110:1). In two of these four, “The Lord” is sitting. Those at the right side are angels standing. In the other Scripture sightings, in which someone other than the Lord is identified as sitting, “that person is viewed as being highly important, royalty in fact.”⁸ So the Lord speaking to the Lord sitting at His right hand identifies someone of heavenly royalty, which can’t be David, but rather his Messiah. Also, the phrases “your enemies” all refer to God’s enemies, not to the enemies of a human lord. And the use of the word footstool in verse 1 is used elsewhere in Hebrew as that of God’s, not man’s.⁹ The Psalmist has an eternal kingdom in mind here, and so it must have an eternal King in mind on the throne.

Also, in verse 4, the Lord spoken to is declared to be an eternal priest, not of the line of David, but of the “order” of Melchizedek. In fact, David can’t be a priest *forever*; only the Messiah can. And this verse links the last section of the Psalm with the first section, and is thus distinctly speaking of “my Lord” as someone other than David. Barry C. David writes: “...no earthly king is ever observed as seated at God’s right hand, no earthly king has ever filled the

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Acts 1-12* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 67.

⁷ Jean Calvin, *Calvin’s NT Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, vol.1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 76.

⁸ Barry C. David, “Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 626 (April – June 2000) : 164.

⁹ *Ibid*, 164.

role of an eternal priest, and no earthly king is able to judge the nations as the king will do.”¹⁰

Cleon L. Rogers rightly points out: “An eternal kingdom demands an eternal king.”¹¹

It should be no surprise that David would prophesy of a future Messiah. As Rogers also notes, “God swore to [him] that one of his descendants would sit on his throne and rule over his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:12-13; Ps 89:3-4; 35-37; 132:11-12).”¹² Look at 2 Sam. 7:12, 13 for example, where the prophet Nathan proclaims to David: “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.” Keil and Delitzsch also point to the last words of David before his death (again, demonstrating that he did not expect himself to reign forever as “my Lord” is promised in Psalm 110:1). In 2 Sam. 23:1-6, we see why we should expect David’s Psalms to focus not only on his earthly kingdom, but rather prophesy of his Seed’s eternal kingdom that alone can give him rest and hope:¹³

These are the last words of David: “The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel’s singer of songs: The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: ‘When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise, on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.’ Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?”

David proclaims that he himself was used by God to speak. But he also says these words with death about to take him. So his hope, when juxtaposed with Psalm 110 and other Messianic

¹⁰ Ibid, 171-172.

¹¹ Cleon L, Jr., Rogers, “The Covenant of David in the New Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (Jan.-March 1994) : 74.

¹² Ibid, 74.

¹³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 5, Psalms, sec. 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 186.

prophesies given to him, is in the eternal Messiah still to come to rule as Lord on an eternal throne.

Keil and Delitzsch also comment that the earthly historical context of Psalm 110 is most likely when the Ark was brought home to Zion, that the termination of the Syro-Ammonitish and Edomitish war “are contemporary connecting links ... [that] furnish the Psalm with the typical ground-colour for its prophetic contents.”¹⁴ David, as we know, is a type of the Messiah. He not only gives us insight into what Jesus will be for us in fullness, but he also knows this and writes of the Messiah, perceiving his earthly victories as types of the eternal victory his Seed will have on God’s endless kingdom:

In this Psalm David looks forth from the height upon which Jahve has raised him by the victory over Ammon into the future of his seed, and there He who carries forward the work begun by him to the highest pitch is the Lord. Over against the King of the future, David is not king, but subject. He calls him, as one of the people, ‘my Lord’. This is the situation of the prophetic-kingly poet. He has received new revelations concerning the future of his seed. He has come down from his throne and the height of his power, and looks up to the Future One. He too sits on Zion. He too is victorious from thence. But His fellowship with God is the most intimate imaginable, and the last enemy is also laid at His feet. And He is not merely king, who as a priest provides for the salvation of His people, He is an eternal Priest by virtue of a sworn promise. The Psalm therefore relates to the history of the future upon a typical ground-work. It is also explicable why the triumph in the case of Ammon and the Messianic image have been thus to David’s mind disconnected from himself. In the midst of that war comes the sin of David, which cast a shadow of sorrow over the whole of his future life and reduced its typical to ashes. Out of these ashes the phoenix of Messianic prophesy here arises. The type, come back to the conscious of himself, here lays down his crown at the feet of the Antitype.¹⁵

Common Connection of Psalm 16 and Psalm 110

We’ve seen that both Psalms are clearly Messianic, so they of course have that in common. But it’s also revealing of the focus of Peter’s argument by the particular verses he uses of each Psalm as he combines them together to convince his Jewish audience that Jesus is the

¹⁴ Ibid, 187.

¹⁵ Ibid, 187.

promised Messiah. Each Psalm is used to make a point about a distinct aspect of Jesus. But Peter also picks specific verses that share the same phrase, “at my right hand”, to show the position of eternal authority equal to God. Keil and Delitzsch write that “... sitting at the right hand signifies not merely an idle honour, but reception into the fellowship of God as regards dignity and dominion, exaltation to a participation in God’s reigning ...”¹⁶ Here again, it would be a strain to suggest that David is speaking of himself; it would be blasphemy for a human lord to aspire to participate in God’s reign – but David takes joy in the anticipated reign of the Messiah, God’s Son, who alone has authority to enjoy God’s heavenly rule over all the nations. And this Messiah -- Peter tells his audience at Pentecost -- has come in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, rose from the dead, made his royal ascension back to the right hand of the Father, and now reigns over His eternal kingdom He just inaugurated on Earth.

Why Peter Quotes Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 in His Pentecostal Speech

Peter gives a summary in verse 36 that says quite directly why he quotes these psalms in this section of his Pentecost speech: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Jesus is Lord. And Jesus is Christ (the Messiah). Peter’s point is that God’s salvific work prophesied in the Old Testament is fulfilled now before their eyes completely in Jesus Christ; and all that is left is for God to put all nations under His feet before He returns in His glory. The New Testament Church is the New Israel, joining the Jews and the Gentiles into one body for Christ. And Christ’s Kingdom is now inaugurated, demonstrated by Christ’s royal ascension to the right hand of God. God had been prophesying about a coming Messiah in the Old Testament who would not see decay in the grave, but would be exalted to the right hand of God to rule over the nations – Peter’s point is

¹⁶ Ibid, 189.

this Messiah has arrived in Jesus Christ, who indeed was raised from the dead and assumed into glory to reign over the nations. And Peter appeals to the Jews about this Jesus, whom they had crucified even though God had accredited Him with miracles, wonders, and signs among them, to now understand who he is and to repent and believe in Him for salvation and eternal life.

Psalm 16 Proves Jesus is the Messiah

Psalm 16 speaks of God staying close to the Messiah, seeing Him through all things, and ultimately delivering Him from death and into the Father's presence. Peter particularly uses verses 26 and 27 to prove Jesus is the promised Messiah whose body would not see decay: "... my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Peter goes on to make the point that they all were aware David died and was buried and did see decay, and so he must be prophesying about the coming Messiah, which they would agree. Psalm 16 makes it clear that the Messiah had to be raised from the dead, and since David wasn't, it was speaking of someone else. That someone else is Jesus, proved by the fact that God raised Him from the dead, which the disciples witnessed, and was confirmed to all by an empty grave. So Psalm 16 proves that Jesus is the Messiah the Jews Peter here addresses had been waiting for: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of this fact" (vs. 32). MacArthur summarizes:

Peter's argument from Psalm 16 can be summarized as follows: The psalm speaks of a resurrection. Since David, however, was not resurrected, it cannot speak of him. Thus, David speaks in the psalm of the Messiah. Hence, Messiah will rise from the dead. Peter now delivers his powerful conclusion: This Jesus God raised up again, to which we all were witnesses. The argument is conclusive: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.¹⁷

¹⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Acts 1-12* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 67.

Psalm 110 Proves Jesus is Lord

Peter quotes Psalm 110 to prove that Jesus also is God, and therefore to receive their submission. Before reciting Psalm 110:1, Peter comments: “[Jesus is] exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you now see and hear” (vs. 33). Because Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand, we know that He is the Lord David is speaking of in Psalm 110:1 that God the Father addresses in the heavenly realms before time. He further proves this by commenting that David did not ascend to God’s right hand, so clearly this is speaking of Christ (Jesus Himself alluded to this during His early ministry when He quoted the same Psalm and verse). Also, this explains the work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that all were astounded by as Peter spoke, and which further affirmed Jesus is Lord. And in all of this, as Barry C. David writes of Psalm 110, “... God is pictured as manifesting a special relationship with His people.”¹⁸

A Special Relationship with a Special People

God had now established through Jesus Christ this special relationship (that David prophesied about) with all He would draw to Him in the Spirit, and He made this message clear through Peter at Pentecost. Cary M. Perdue sums up Peter’s intention in Acts 2:25-35: “Peter appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures, very familiar to his Jewish listeners, to show that death and resurrection of the Messiah were announced long ago. Therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus should not be considered a strange event.”¹⁹ He is proclaiming Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah who would provide salvation for God’s people, and the coming Lord who, as King of Kings, will return with all nations under his feet in judgment. This Jesus is proved to be

¹⁸ Barry C. David, “Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 626 (April – June 2000) : 170.

¹⁹ Cary M. Perdue, *Acts Analyzed and Explained* (Manila, R.P.: OMF Publishers, 1983), 40.

both Christ and Lord by Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 along with the testimony of the apostles who witnessed him raised from the dead and ascend into heaven. F.F. Bruce writes: “The triumph of Jesus was attested by the witness of his disciples and the witness of the OT prophecy ...”²⁰ And three thousand Jews who knew the facts of the Messianic prophesies in these Psalms and the apostles’ witness were undeniable believed in Jesus and were baptized into the body of His family that day. Christ’s work having been completed, the Holy Spirit began to use the Church to conquer the hearts of the nations unto the uttermost parts of the earth. As the nations were delivered into submission under the lordship of Christ (promised by the Father), only Christ’s imminent Kingly return was left to be fulfilled.

²⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the NT: The Book of Acts, Rev. Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 33.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bruce, F.F. *The New International Commentary on the NT: The Book of Acts, Rev. Ed.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Calvin, Jean. *Calvin's NT Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles. Vol.1.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.

David, Barry, C. "Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 626 (April – June 2000) : 160-173.

Kaiser, Walter C Jr. "The promise to David in Psalm 16 and its application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (S 1980) : 219-229.

Keil, C.F., and Delitzsch, F. *Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol. 5, Psalms.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Acts 1-12.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Perdue, Cary M. *Acts Analyzed and Explained.* Manila, R.P.: OMF Publishers, 1983.

Rogers, Cleon L, Jr. "The Covenant of David in the New Testament." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (Jan.-March 1994) : 71-84.