



Translation, Interpretation and Exposition of Psalm 93 and 110

“In a world in which most people are awash in a culture narrative that has little room for serious engagement with faith, the psalmist calls us to declare our belief in the confession that ‘the Lord reigns.’ And this confession cannot and should not lead us to devolve into a faith that is a ‘harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment,’ nor should it lead us to slip into some form of moral escapism.” (Adapted from Tucker and Grant, p. 597 who quote John Milbank.)

Psalm 93 says that there is something new and different about Yahweh’s kingship. Psalm 110 gives us the answer: King David foresaw a day when the co-regency he enjoyed with God as a human king over Zion would be embodied in a son of David who was himself David’s Sovereign, “a person on an entirely different plane than David, to whom David himself would look up to. . .” (Wilcock is in quotes.)

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THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Psalm 93ⁱ (from Book IV)

¹Yahwehⁱⁱ has assumed kingship,*

He is clothed with majesty.

Yahweh has clothed and girded Himself with strength.*

Indeed, the worldⁱⁱⁱ is firmly fixed; it shall not move.

²Your throne has long been firmly fixed.*

You are eternal!

The ‘threat’ posed by cosmic upheaval^{iv}

³The cosmic waters^v have lifted up, O Yahweh,

The cosmic waters have lifted up their voice;^{vi*}

The cosmic waters lift up their roaring,

⁴More than the sound of many waters,*

Mightier are they than the breakers of the sea--

Mighty on high is Yahweh!

Yahweh’s sure testimony of an enduring house

⁵Your testimonies^{vii} are very dependable.

As for your house,^{viii} it well suited^{ix} in holiness--*

O Yahweh, to the end of days.

Psalm 110 (from Book V)

Concerning David, a Psalm

“The point is that David was looking into the future and speaking, awe-struck, of a descendant of his who would be his Sovereign, one on an entirely different plane, to whom he would look up as his people looked up to him.” (Wilcock, Psalms 72-150, 166-67.)

“Israelite interpreters, even in the face of harsh realities of history, never surrendered the hope for a coming monarch of the Davidic line who would rule as God’s viceregent” (B.W. Anderson.)

Yahweh decrees through David to make his Sovereign His victorious right-hand warrior king

¹Oracle of Yahweh^x to my lord;^{xi*}

“Sit at my right hand^{xii}

Until I place your enemies

As a footstool for your feet.^{xiii}

²Yahweh will stretch forth your^{xiv} mighty scepter^{xv} from Zion.*

Rule^{xvi} in the midst of your enemies!^{xvii}

Saintly enlistees help and encourage^{xviii}

³Your people will voluntarily enlist^{xix} on the day of your armament,*

In holy garments from the womb of the dawn.

To You, your youth are as the dew.^{xx}

Yahweh decrees to make David akin to the ancient priest of [Jeru]salem

⁴Yahweh has sworn and will not recant:*

“You are a priest^{xxi} forever,

After the manner of Melchizedek.”^{xxii}

Assurance of victory in battle over kings

⁵The LORD^{xxiii} is at your right hand;

He smites kings on the day of his wrath.

He makes judgments upon the nations,*

Heaping up bodies,

Smiting the head^{xxiv} over the earth’s breadth.

David’s sustenance

⁷He will drink from the brook along the way,*

Thereby keeping high the head.^{xxv}

ⁱ This is one of several “Yahweh is King” psalms; the others are 47, 93-99 (excepting possibly 94). There are three ways to translate: “Yahweh reigns,” “Yahweh is king,” and “Yahweh has become king.” The third is most literal (depending on how the verb’s aspect is best understood). The first is often preferred because there was never a time when He wasn’t king. “Yahweh is king” renders the verb (“be[come] king”) as a noun, but the translation is acceptable because that is the meaning.

ⁱⁱ “The name ‘Yahweh’ comes first as though to say ‘He and no other’; unworthy contenders for the throne have been routed. Proclamation is therefore made that the Lord begins his reign, taking the throne in the robes of his unique majesty and power.” (Eaton, *Psalms*, 331.)

ⁱⁱⁱ See Psalm 96:10.

^{iv} “Continuing his tribute of praise, the singer recalls the Lords’ victory over the chaos-waters, the victory seen in poetic traditions as crucial to creation, the waters being made to serve the economy of life (cf. 29:3ff., 74:12ff.). The style here is especially reminiscent of the very ancient poetry from Ugarit on the north Syrian coast . . . and it reflects the tradition of personifying the water-powers with titles. We might render more literally: ‘More than the thunders of their majestys the waters, of their lordships their breakers of the sea, more lordly on high was Yahweh.’ The effect is ironic. These would-be kings rose up to do battle, proud waters that roared and dashed with thunderous voices. But the outcome proved that it was to Yahweh, high above them, that the true majesty belonged.” (Eaton, *Psalms*, 332, emphasis mine.)

^v Rivers is the literal translation. In ancient Palestine (even to this day), dry river beds could instil fear and dread in people by quickly becoming raging torrents. Yet the primary reference is to ominous primordial cosmic waters (as in Gen. 1:2) that were associated with chaos. The “rivers” are thus a metaphor for all ominous entities that rise up in rebellion against God. And just as God divided and conquered the waters in the beginning, creating dry land for safe habitation, He continues even now to outdo and outclass those forces by the power of his own kingly majesty. (In ancient myths from the time, gods were declared king when they defeated the “sea” and built a temple on top of its waters.)

^{vi} The devastating tsunami that struck the Asian subcontinent on Boxing Day 2004 illustrates the devastating effect of the breaking of the divinely ordained barrier between the sea and the dry land that Yahweh established when he created the world. Similar disarray results from the breaking of the moral boundaries that God has established as part of His fixed order (see v. 5 where the psalmist, in referring to Yahweh's testimonies, seamlessly moves from the cosmic to the moral.) See further the following note.

^{vii} The switch from God's creation to God's testimonies seems surprising to us who regard nature and God's moral precepts independently. Not so this psalmist, neither the wisdom books of the OT. "In the view of the poet the establishment of the created order and the moral order are inseparable." (Tucker and Grant, 379). When this early poem was written and stood alone, the Lord's testimonies were likely His commandments (maybe specifically the Ten Commandments) here associated with a thunderous voice that was superior to that of the lordly cosmic waters (cf. Psalm 29). In its present context within the psalter, "the psalmist is reminding his readers that the entirety of the revelation they read—the psalms and the whole cannon—is completely trustworthy as a guide for life. The implication is clear: Yahweh rules as sovereign over everything so his word can be trusted and must be obeyed as a pattern for life." (Tucker and Grant, 380, emphasis mine.)

^{viii} When this early poem was written and stood alone, the Lord's house was his cosmic temple above the waters of the firmament; in its context now within the later collection of psalms, it refers to the temple in Zion (cf. 99:2-3), the adornment of which reflects His holiness. (Given the close link between Yahweh's house and David's dynasty—cf. 2 Samuel 7, 23—the 'house' which is the subject of Yahweh's testimonies might echo David's house; in this case the "you" of "your house" could reflect *double-entendre* [as in both God's eternal habitation and David's dynasty, often called "house"]. If so, this would be a further case of Yahweh's reign being closely related to that of David's Son.)

^{ix} A Dead Sea Scroll manuscript has "dwelling" (*nwh*) instead of "[well] suited." If correct, the line would read something like, "As for your house, it is a holy dwelling place."

^x This expression is richly prophetic, which is all the more striking for occurring only here in the Psalms. The point is that the author, attributed to David himself, is speaking a prophetic word from the Lord. And what is that word? David attests to what Yahweh said to a David's "lord", i.e., a sovereign royal superior of David. David thus prophesies here of a future dynastic heir who, like David, will rule on God's behalf, but whose status will be more like God than David himself. No wonder Jesus used this shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Matthew to prove to the Scribes and Pharisees that the Messiah (a 'son' of David) would be more than a mere 'son' (heir), but David's "lord." (Mt. 22:41-45.)

^{xi} Often translators fail to distinguish three different terms in Hebrew for what we render, without distinction, "Lord." The three terms are 'adonî, 'adonay, and YHWH, the latter being the personal name of God. The first refers to a human master or superior (best rendered, as here in v. 1, "lord"). The second refers to YHWH and reflects a choice not to use God's personal name (most often out of reverence). This is best rendered "Lord," as in Ps 110:5. One reason why I use "Yahweh" in translation is to indicate the presence of the personal name of God (called the tetragrammaton, in effect "four letters" YHWH).

Even when the name YHWH is supplied in the text Jewish readers would not pronounce the divine name but instead said 'adonay. So routine was this practice that the scribes who preserved the text supplied the vowels for 'adonay between the consonants YHWH. Not understanding the conflation of vowels from one word ('adonay) with the consonants of the divine name (yhwh), Gentile readers mistakenly thought (as still do Jehovah's Witnesses) that the Lord's name was pronounced Jahowah (i.e., Jehovah)!

^{xii} This is where the Host of Heaven are said to sit (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18). David's "lord" is more than simply another king like David himself. The heavenly throne implied here invites recollection also with the throne in Isaiah 6 and Pss 93 and 99 (Vaillancourt, 126).

^{xiii} "Exalted thrones had a footstool, and there are Egyptian examples of such stools formed or decorated to symbolize the subjected foes." (Eaton, *Psalms*, 384.)

^{xiv} I.e., that of David's "lord."

^{xv} "The word 'sceptre' operates as a synecdoche [pronounced: se-néck-de-key], a single term that implies a much larger idea (in this instance kingship)." (Tucker and Grant, *Psalms 2*, 592.)

^{xvi} This word for rule is atypical; its meaning includes forceful subjugation against one's will ("in the midst of enemies") and can imply rule over a broad realm (cf. Ps. 72:8; Phil. 2:9-11).

^{xvii} This is an imperative shout, a cheering on of David's lord to prevail over God's foes.

^{xviii} The exact meaning of this verse has been clouded by time, as a comparison of translations demonstrates. Nevertheless, the gist of the meaning is that volunteers will rally behind the king in a holy war, and that, as the dawn mysteriously yields dew, so the king will be refreshed and renewed. [So Kidner and Wilcock.] For similar poetic imagery, see Isa14:12, 26:19.

^{xix} "The sense is of a voluntary act which one is not constrained to perform . . . The sense of 'voluntariness' makes the most sense for Ps. 110.3. In other words, this verse speaks of the people of David's lord as a collective *nědābāh* [the word in Hebrew here] at his disposal." (Vaillancourt, *Multi-faceted Savior*, p. 102).

^{xx} I see here continued the imagery of volunteer enlistees being pure and ready from their early youth.

^{xxi} David and his sons are said to have observed in priestly roles in the narratives about their lives (cf. 2 Sam 6:14, 18; 8:18; 1 Kings 8:14, 55, 62-64)" (Vaillancourt, 126).

^{xxii} The JPSV ventures an alternative reading, "a rightful king by my decree."

^{xxiii} The word for "Lord" here is not the personal name Yahweh, but the title "adonay" vocalized in such a way as to denote Him and not just any sovereign or superior. "Whereas in verse 1, the king was invited to sit at the right hand of Yahweh, in verse 5 the king is informed that Yahweh will appear at his right hand when he engages in battle. . . . [T]he former . . . is a sign of honor; the latter . . . implies protection and support. . . . [Moreover,] [b]y standing at the right hand of the king, Yahweh will do more than simply support the king in battle—Yahweh will act as the universal king. He will vanquish those who resist his vision for a rightly ordered creation and he will prepare the way for his king to establish God's rule over the whole earth (v. 6b)" (Tucker and Grant, *Psalms 2*, 594, emphasis mine.)

^{xxiv} Vaillancourt has drawn attention to a suggestive similarity between the crushing of the head here and the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent in Gen. 3:15.

^{xxv} The meaning is perhaps based on the assumption that a foreign army has no right to drink water on local soil. To do so, is an assertion of superiority over the vanquished. Similarly, to lift one's head high reflects definitive triumph over one's enemies. Thus, "with this act the king signals that he is the beneficiary of Yahweh's judgment against the nations." (Tucker and Grant, 594.)