A KING AND PRIEST FOREVER

Psalm 110

I have lived through forty-five Easters, but I have never experienced an Easter like this one. Easter’s traditional focus on Jesus’ death and resurrection usually draws larger-than-normal crowds to Sunday worship…but not this year. This year we are locked away in our homes and many people are thinking about the coronavirus and the economy rather than Jesus’ death and resurrection. So, this is my Easter lesson, but will not be like other Easter lessons I have delivered. We will continue our focus on the Hebrew psalms, this time considering one of the messianic psalms. We will explore how it offered a hope for Israel that carried them through many hardships and how that hope founds it unlikely fulfillment in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

A psalm honoring God’s king

• In Psalm 110, David describes the honor God (“LORD”, the Hebrew word for Yahweh, God’s covenant name) gives his “Lord”1 (adoni, a Hebrew word describing a ‘master’, ‘ruler’, someone of higher status that the one using the term).

• Whether David understood his “Lord” to refer to a future ruler or to an idealized picture of the king, he clearly wrote about the honored place God would give that person. He wrote, for example, that:
  o God would make him a king with a rule extending outward from Jerusalem into the midst of his enemies’ territories (Psalm 110:1-3).
  o God would secondly make him a “priest forever” so he could mediate between God and the people (Psalm 110:4).
  o Finally, God would make the individual an exalted warrior to whom, from His position at His side, He would give victory over all of his enemies (Psalm 110:5-7).

• Regardless of how David understood its meaning, elements within his psalm combined with later prophetic writing to cause the Jews of the first century to consider it a psalm about God’s promised messianic king (cf. Matthew 22:41-46).
  o David, for example, wrote that God would make the king “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4).
    ▪ Melchizedek was a non-Jewish priest-king who ruled Jerusalem during the time of Abraham (Genesis 14:18).
    ▪ Even though David ruled in Jerusalem and sometimes performed priestly tasks (cf. 2 Samuel 6) and even though his sons were called “priests” (2 Samuel 8:18), a distinction nevertheless existed between the kings and

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1 Psalm 110:1. All quotes from the Bible come from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.
priests because God gave the privilege of the priesthood to the Levites (Exodus 29:4-9; Numbers 3:5-51).

o Hundreds of years later, however, Ezekiel wrote about a coming figure to whom God would give the right to possess the roles of both priest and king (Ezekiel 21:24-27; cf. Zechariah 6:9-13; 3:8).

- The messianic anticipations imbedded in that promise remained unfulfilled by the first century and therefore attracted the Jews’ attention when Peter and the Hebrew’s writer claimed the psalm found its fulfillment in Jesus (Acts 2:33-36; Hebrews 1:3; 6:19-10:18).
- The stir created by claiming Jesus fulfilled the prophecy came, in part, because of the unusual way he filled it. For example:
  o Jesus possessed none of the expected leadership qualities and instead devoted himself to a prophetic ministry of teaching and service (Isaiah 52:12-53:13; Matthew 4:17, 23; 20:20-28).
  o God exalted Jesus and established his reign as king through his crucifixion (John 18:33-37; 19:1-3, 17-19).
  o God gave Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth”, which Jesus then entrusted to the most unlikely people possible - his apostles (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-11).

Applications

- God issued promises to the Jews that gave them a hope that carried them through even their darkest times. Jesus introduced new promises from God that offers us an anchoring hope (Hebrews 6:13-20).
- Just as God worked in Israel’s world to accomplish His purposes, so too does He work in our present world to accomplish His future purposes (Romans 8:28-30).
- We can therefore be confident that God still works in the world today because He still has promises remaining to be fulfilled.
- Our responsibility involves living faithful to God in the present so that we can enjoy the benefits of His fulfilled promises.
- We must, however, learn to submit our expectations to God’s will because He has a history of fulfilling His promises in unexpected ways.
- Jesus is, and always will be, the answer (cf. Matthew 5:17).

God’s promises through Jesus give us a hope that can secure us in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. We live in the present with an eye to that future hope, to the life after this life. May God help us live faithfully in our present lives so that we can enjoy the fulfillment of the hope He offers us through Jesus.