PSALM 110,1 AND NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY: A SUGGESTED INTERPRETATION

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In 1993 the present writer published an article in the journal Biblica in which he observed that Jesus on the cross died as man, not as God, and that this seemed to be a supposition underlying the account of the crucifixion by the author of the Fourth Gospel. According to this 1993 article the author of the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus on the cross as “handing on the Spirit” (primary meaning of the phrase) at the moment in which, as man, he dies (secondary meaning of the phrase). The supposition, implied in the primary meaning when placed in the context of the secondary meaning, is that as God Jesus did not die. The present article will use these observations as a starting point for examining the use of Ps 110,1 in selected New Testament texts, and will conclude with the suggestion that Ps 110,1, when placed in the context of certain contrasting psalms, implies that Jesus as God did not die.

Ps 110[109], 1 in the Septuagint reads: 

heos an tho tous echthrous sou hypodion ton podon sou

— “until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet”. The prominence which this verse has in the New Testament is remarkable. There is, first of all, its citation by Jesus in the disputation presented at Mark 12,36/Matt 20,34. Evidently the evangelist interpreted 12,35-37 chiefly as an assurance that Jesus’ divine dignity outstrips Jewish notions of the messiah as David’s son” (D. M. Hay, Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity [Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 18; Abingdon Press, Nashville – New York 1973], 114).

2. A preliminary version of the present paper was given at a session of the “Paul as Exegete” Task Force at the Fifty-Ninth General Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America at the University of Saint Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A., on August 12, 1996. The author is grateful for the observations made there by members of the task force and in particular for the detailed written response of Dr. Judith M. Ryan.
3. This is the reading presented in A. Rahlfs (ed.), Septuagint. X. Psalmi cum Odis (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Göttingen 1931), ad loc.
4. Translations from Scripture are by the present writer.
22,24/Luke 20,42-43; he seems to be suggesting that his origin is transcendent in some mysterious sense. Then there is the dramatic allusion to Ps 110,1 by Jesus before the Sanhedrin at Mark 14,62/Matt 26,24/Luke 22,69 in what are certainly key texts in the Synoptic gospels. Finally, there are other citations or allusions to Ps 110,1 in the New Testament – for example, Heb 1,13; 1 Cor 15,25; Eph 1,20; Acts 2,34-35, texts to be studied in the body of this article. The importance of Ps 110,1 in New Testament christology, together with its mysterious, allusive character, is itself an indication that it merits constantly renewed study.

In the four New Testament texts to be discussed in this article, Ps 110,1 is used in conjunction with another Old Testament text according to the construction gezera shawa. That is to say, Ps 110,1 is found paired with another text, and an advance in knowledge results from the light the paired verses and their contexts throw on each other because of their juxtaposition. On the supposition that the gezera shawa construction is being used to make a point about Ps 110,1, the four texts will be examined from the point of view indicated above.

6. Cf Hay, Glory 64: "... it [i.e., the saying in Mark 14,52] has extraordinary importance dramatically and theologically within Mark's gospel. Here for the first and only time the three decisive titles of Marcan christology are openly claimed by Jesus."

7. The phrase gezera shawa means "an equal decision", and is used to link two passages in Scripture with the purpose of showing that they are mutually illuminating in some way or other. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary (Pontificio Istituto Biblico; Rome 1995) 173 and 173, n. 204. Some scholars object to the use of this Jewish exegetical device to elucidate New Testament texts, claiming that the first evidence of such use is found only in rabbinic literature two centuries after the New Testament was written. But a number of uses of the technique seem to have been isolated in the New Testament by scholars. To deny their findings poses a conundrum: if in the New Testament are found texts which comply with the basic rules known for the use of gezera shawa in Rabbinic texts but are not to be considered true examples of gezera shawa, what are they? For examples of the alleged use of gezera shawa in the Epistle to the Hebrews cf. H. W. Attridge, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews (Hermeneia; Fortress; Philadelphia, 1989) 128-129, and 129, n. 77. Attridge cites an example of this technique used in Philo, apropos of which he remarks, "The method, no doubt, was also traditional". As witness to the truth of Attridge's surmise see now T. Lorenzin, "L'uso della regola ermeneutica gezarah shawah nel Cronista", Revista Biblica Italiana 44 (1996) 65–70.
I. Hebrews 1,12 and 2,8

A gezera shawa at Heb 1,13 and 2,8 joins Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,5-7. The phrase linking the two citations is hypodion ton podon sou / hypokato ton podon autou:

Heb 1,13bc kathou ek dexion mou, heos an tho tous echthrous sou hypodion ton podon sou.

Heb 8,8a panta hypetaxas hypokato ton podon autou.

The exordium introduces Jesus as “Son” (1,2), and prefaces what follows the exordium by saying that Jesus has inherited a “name” (1,4). This name would seem to be “Son [of God]” in the context of Heb 1,13 for Heb 1,5-12 proceeds from the association of “Son” with the enthronement imagery of Ps 110,1 at Heb 1,3 and culminates in the special relationship with God above all angels indicated at 1,13 with the citation of Ps 110,1. Ps 8 serves as the Scripture text summing up the

8. G. J. Steyn (Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum [Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 12; Pharos; Kampen 1995], 118), links the two psalms without invoking gezera shawa. Likewise M. Hengel (“Psalm 110 und die Erhöhung des Auferstandenen zur Rechten Gottes”, in C. Breytenbach – H. Paulsen [eds.], Anfänge der Christologie. Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 65. Geburtstag [Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Göttingen 1991], 53); “Lediglich die schriftgelehrte Akribie des Hebdierbriefes vermeidet jede Zitatenkontamination zwischen Ps 110 und Ps 8, dafür rückt die beide Teste aufs engste zusammen ...”. The reason for keeping the two psalm citations close but separate is the use of gezera shawa. The use of Ps 110,1 in conjunction with Ps 8,7 at Heb 1,13 – 2,8 is also noted by Hay, Glory, 35 and 42, though he does not use the technical term gezera shawa to describe the link. It is a major weakness of his otherwise remarkably perceptive book that the use of Ps 110,1 in conjunction with Ps 8,7, noted at 1 Cor 15,25-27 and Eph 1,20-22 as well as in Hebrews, is never analyzed from the standpoint of the gezera shawa construction. For an interpretation of Hebrews 1,13 – 2,8 which makes use of gezera shawa in relating Ps 110 and Ps 8 cf. J. Swetnam, “The Structure of Hebrews 1,1 – 3,6”, Melita Theologica 43 (1992) 59–60.

9. Citation from the New Testament are taken from Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece (Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart 271993 [2. Druck 1994]).


11. “In Heb 1 the main christological title is ‘the Son’, and references to it are located near the references to the psalm in 1,3 and 1,13. Moreover, in 1,3-4 the enthronement at the right hand of God is directly connected with the obtaining of a name more excellent than that of any angel, viz. ‘the Son’ ” (Hay, Glory, 109).
second part, which is best interpreted as referring to Jesus as “Son of Man”, one of the phrases cited in Ps 8.12 “Son” here in both parts seems to be used in a semitic sense of “likeness”: the “Son” of 1,5 – 2,4 is “Son of God” because he is like God to the point of being able to be addressed as God (1,8);13 the “son” of 2,5 – 3,6 is “Son of Man” because he is like men (2,17). Through the common phrases hypodion ton podon sou: (“as a footstool for his feet”) of Ps 110,1 and hypokato ton podon autou (“under his feet”) of Ps 8,7, the two parts are mutually illuminatory by reason of their juxtaposition: The same Jesus who is Son of God is also Son of Man, so that what can be said about Jesus as Son of God can be said about Jesus as Son of Man. Thus, the Jesus who is Son of God truly suffered death and because of this is crowned with glory (Heb 2,9).14

The section of Hebrews leading up to the use of Ps 110,1 reflects the exaltation of Jesus. The section following the use of Ps 8,5-7 at Heb 2,6b-8 reflects the death of Jesus and its implications for the “seed of Abraham” (2,16). The phrases linking the two sections have as their common denominator the idea of “subjection”. This would seem to imply that the idea of subjection is relevant to each of the two sections, so that the subjection of which Ps 110,1 speaks about throws light on the subjection of which Ps 8,7 speaks about, and vice versa. Thus their pairing results in an advance in knowledge about the subject in question, in this case, Jesus.

In the context of this suggested structure for 1,5 – 3,6 and the importance of the idea of subjection, the time frame indicated by the two psalm citations merits attention. The citation from Ps 110,1 says: kathou ek dexion mou, heos an tho tous echthrous sou hypodion ton podon sou – “Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet”: the subjection is presented as taking place in the future. The citation from Ps 8,8 says: panta hypetaxas hypokato ton podon

12. Hay, (109) notes the relevance of “son of man” for Heb 2: “In Heb 2.6 ff, there is a quotation of Ps 8 which includes the phrase ‘son of man’, and this passage seems to be a continuation of the subjection theme raised in Heb 1,13 with a quotation of Ps 110,1.” Exactly so. But Hay is reluctant to think this relevance with the affirmation that the author of Hebrews was thinking of the phrase “son of man” when he cites it as a apart of the quotation of Ps 8 at Heb 2,6 (ibid.). The possible appropriateness of such thinking of the author of Hebrews is to be noted, however. The use of the title “Son of Man” in the citation of Ps 8 in Hebrews is pointed out by Hengel, 54.


14. For a fuller discussion of these points cf. Swetnam, “Hebrews 1,1 – 3,6”, 60-64. In Heb 2,14 Jesus is pictured as taking on flesh and blood in order to achieve expiation through death – an implicit portrayal of the incarnation of the Son of God and, incidentally, an indication that the author of Hebrews was operating on the supposition that Jesus as God cannot die.
autou - “You have subordinated all things under his feet”: the subjection is presented as taking place in the past. A possible way of reconciling the time differences in the two citations is to view Ps 8,7 as referring to a state foretold by Ps 110,1, i.e., the subjection of all things to Jesus is a present reality, even though this reality is not as yet visible (Heb 2,8). But this interpretation is possible only by ignoring the indication given at Heb 10,12-13: houtos de mian hyper hamartion prosenegkas thysian eis to dieneikes ekathisen en dexia, tou theou, to loipon ekdechomenos heos tethosin hoi echhroi autou hypopodion ton podon autou - “... but this one, after offering one sacrifice for sins, took his seat forever at the right hand of God, and from now on waits until his enemies may be placed as a footstool for his feet.” The allusion to Ps 110,1 is unmistakable, with the words “as a footstool for his feet” cited exactly as at Heb 1,13. And the context speaks of the coming judgment (cf. Heb 10,25.27–30.39). For the author of Hebrews the subjection of which Ps 110,1 speaks is still in the future, even though “all things” have already been subjected under Jesus’ feet. The subjection of which Ps 110,1 speaks is different, then, from the subjection of which Ps 8,7 speaks, as understood by the author of Hebrews.

If, in Hebrews, the subjection of which Ps 110,1 speaks is temporally different from the subjection of which Ps 8,7 speaks, the realities subjected must be different. The “enemies” of which Ps 110,1 speaks at Heb 1,13 are ill-defined, even when Heb 10,27 – which speaks vaguely about those “in opposition” – is taken into

consideration. One accordingly suspects that there is a certain amount of formalism involved, inherited from tradition.

The “all things” (panta) of which Ps 8,7 speaks at Heb 2,8 would seem to have a connection with “the world to come” referred to thematically at Heb 2,5: just as God “subjected (hypotasso) all things” to Jesus (with the implication that Jesus is being considered as man) as indicated in Ps 8,7, so God did not “subject” (hypotasso) the world to come to angels (with the implication – clarified by the following context – that the one to whom this world is subjected is human). The time values of the elements in Heb 2,5 should be noted: ou gar aggeloi hypetaxen ten oikoumenen ten mellousan peri hes laloumen – “For not to angels did he subject the world to come about which we are speaking.” The subjection has been achieved, but it concerns a world which is still to come. This contrast of past subjection of a future reality seems to be reflected in Heb 2,8, where all things without exception have

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16. Cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Paternoster Press Carlisle 1993) 535–536. It is not clear whether the enemies are conceived of as God’s enemies or Christ’s, and the author of Hebrews seems unconcerned about making any clarification. Some authors claim that the enemies envisioned in Heb 1,13 are demonic powers, but this claim has not met with widespread acceptance for the simple reason that if the author did have such enemies in mind he has been uncharacteristically inept in linking them with the psalm. Cf. Hay, *Glory*, 126, n. 13. In 1 Clement 36,5-6, in a context suggesting dependence on Hebrews or the use of a common source, the author says that the “enemies” of Ps 110,1 are those who “oppose his [Christ’s] will” (hoi phauloi kai anti tassmenoi toj thelemati autou). Text from A. Jaubert (ed.), *Clément de Rome, Épître aux Corinthiens* (Sources Chrétiennes, 167; Editions du Cerf, Paris 1971) 160. On Clement’s use of Hebrews, cf. D. A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testament in Clement of Rome* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 34; E. J. Brill, Leiden 1973) 177 (Clement’s use of Hebrews is “certain”). A. Lindmann (*Die Clemensbriefe* [Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 17; J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); Tübingen 1973], 177) suggests that the specification of enemies by Clement was prompted by the local situation in Corinth. The opportunity for the author of 1 Clement to be specific with regard to Corinth seems to imply that there is something unspecified about the enemies referred to in the original context.

17. Cf. Hay, *Glory*, 125: “This author [sc., the author of Hebrews] refers to a tradition of using Ps 110,1 to describe Christ’s future victory over his foes, but his own interests lie elsewhere. He assumes that the psalm verse refers to an eschatological delay stretching into the future, but his attention is primarily focused on Jesus’ sacrifice in the past.”

18. The positive part of the statement is reserved to 2,9 where Jesus, by implication, is the one to whom the subjection has been made. The context of Ps 8 implies that Jesus is being considered as man. Cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 143-144. Viewed in the context of what has preceded, Heb 2,5 can also be understood, secondarily, as referring to Jesus as superior to the angels.
already been subjected to Jesus (Heb 2,9), but this subjection is not yet evident. The import of all this seems to be explained in Heb 2,9-10: Jesus, because of suffering death, is now crowned with glory, and God – “on account of whom are all things (panta) and through whom are all things (panta)” – is leading many (other) sons to glory through him who suffered. The attribution to God of final and efficient causality of “all things” (panta), unless it is to be understood as a gratuitous insertion, must have some bearing on the glory to which the sons are being led but especially on the sufferings, i.e., death, through which “the pioneer of salvation”, i.e., Jesus, was fittingly brought to his glory (expressed in the priestly terminology of “perfection”): the reason for the “fitting” nature of Jesus’ sufferings has to do with human needs.

These human needs, in the context of mention of Jesus’ “sufferings”, i.e., death, must refer to the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death alluded to at Heb 2,14 and set forth more explicitly elsewhere in the epistle (e.g., Heb 9,22). The mention of God as final and efficient cause of “all things”, in other words, is motivated by the desire of the author of Hebrews to show that Jesus’ death was a part of God’s plan (final causality) and fully under his control (efficient causality), yet with sufficient distance to allow for the immediate and secondary causes. The use of “all things” (panta) at 2,17 supports this view of “all things” in 2,10, for in 2,17 the phrase “to be made like the brothers in all things” seems to refer to Jesus’ sufferings and death. The result is that the “all things” which God has subjected to Jesus as man are the ultimates, death and that which is involved in death, suffering: God has shared his prerogative of master of “all things” with his Son not simply as God (which was always the case – cf. Heb 1,2-3), but as man.

From the above it seems proper to conclude that in Heb 1,5 – 3,6 the citation from Ps 110,1 – heos an tho tous echthrous sou hypodion ton podon sou – is used to refer to Christ insofar as he is Son of God and that in the context the subjection spoken of is a thing of the future and refers vaguely to enemies. By contrast, the

19. This mention of the word “Jesus” at Heb 2,9 is the first time this name appears in Hebrews. According to the structure being presupposed here this is an appropriate place for the name “Jesus” to appear, for it thus stands at the first section of the epistle which speaks of the Son of man.
20. “Propriety here is not a consequence of God’s nature, but of human needs and the salvific action that meets them” (Attridge, Hebrews, 82).
21. Cf. Ellingworth, Hebrews, 180: “The repeated use of peirazo in 2:18, and the thought of the paragraph as a whole, suggest that even in v. 17 kata panta may refer especially to Christ’s “sufferings”, that is, to his death (vv. 9-10, 14)."
subjection of which the corresponding scripture citation speaks of, in this case Ps 8,7, has already taken place and refers primarily to death, and is found in a context which considers Jesus as man. Thus the common theme of “subjection” clarifies who Jesus is. 22

II. I Corinthians 15,25-27

In the use of gezera shawa at 1 Cor 15,25-27, Psalms 110 and 8 are again linked, with the linking words being homogenized into the identical phrase hypo tous podas autou:

1 Cor 15,25  dei gar auton basileuein achri hou the, pantas tous echthrous hypo tous podas autou

1 Cor 15,27  panta gar hypetaxen hypo tous podas autou

Ps 110,1 is alluded to in v. 25 through the phrase dei gar auton basileuein anchri hou the, pantas tous echthrous hypo tous podas autou, the change of person from the first to the third precluding labelling the reference as a direct citation. 23 The subject of action indicated by the word the, is, of course, disputed: is it God or Christ? 24 But if the allusion is placed in the context of the gezera shawa construction,

22. It is essential to note that the argument given here about the time distinction between Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7 is to be taken very precisely, in regard to the meaning each contributes to the gezera shawa. When their proper meanings are juxtaposed in the context of Hebrews, a progress in knowledge occurs in the form of a temporal sequence: the one and the same Son (Heb 1,2) becomes man (Heb 2,14), suffers death (Heb 2,9), and then is exalted to God’s right hand (Heb 1,3; 10,12). When used in the gezera shawa the two psalms do not lose their proper meanings: in virtue of Ps 110,1 the “enemies” have not as yet been placed under Christ’s feet; in virtue of Ps 8,7, “all things”, i.e., especially death, already have. Thus the reality of the death of Christ is placed in its proper faith context in a way intelligible to the addressees: neither his divinity nor his humanity is diminished.


24. “The subject of thei in v. 25 is best taken as God, but even if Jesus is taken as the subject instead, the citation from Ps 110,1 is “plainly meant ... to point to the work of the Father” (Hay, Glory, 61).
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the balance of probability falls on the side of God. For God is clearly the one who “subordinates all things under his [i.e., Christ’s] feet” in the citation of Ps 8,7 at v. 27 (cf ...tote autos ho huios hypotagesetai to, hypotaxanti autoi ta panta). This interpretation also squares better with the original meaning of Ps 110,1 and its use elsewhere in the New Testament.25

In the section 15,20-28 Paul states his thesis about human destiny in Christ, after having shown the Corinthians the results of their thesis (15,12-19).26 The introduction of Christ into the Jewish apocalyptic scheme modifies Paul’s presentation. He understands from the Jewish scheme that death will not be annihilated until the end of the messianic kingdom. But he understands this kingdom as being already present, for Christ is already risen.27 By implication Christ is thus reigning, an implication made explicit in v. 25 (det gar auton basileuein – “for it is necessary that he reign”) – under Christ’s feet.28

The addition of the qualification “all” to the implicit citation of Ps 110,1 has to functions: 1) it indicates that attention is being given to the specification of the enemies listed in the previous verse, “principality” (arche), “ruling force” (exousia), and “power” (dynamis); 2) it makes the citation a clearer match with the accompanying Ps 8,7. With regard to the first function, the elements mentioned are a conventional list for power of whatever kind.29 With regard to the second function,

25. “The subject of katargesei is probably Christ; that of thei is ambiguous; but the subject of hypetaxen in verse 27, in the light of what follows, is God. If it were not, Paul would here be at clear variance with the usual use of the text in the NT. For the subject in the other citations is certainly God, as in the original context, who accepts the Lord at his right hand, where he sits until God finally makes his enemies his footstool” (W. Carr, Angels and Principalities. The background, meaning and development of the Pauline phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai [Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series, 42; University Press; Cambridge 1981], 90).
28. The use of the royal imagery implied in basileuein, “to reign”, is consistent with the royal imagery of Christ enthroned at the right of God, imagery proper to Ps 110,1.
29. “… the parallelism between ‘all authority’ and ‘death’ lies primarily in the historical sphere: all human authority is being robbed of its power and ultimately even the relentless power of death will be reduced to impotence” (Carr, Angels, 91–92).
in some way the “enemies” of Ps 110,1 are now considered to be included among the “all things” of Ps 8,7. This emerges from the use of the word “for” (gar) of v. 27, linking this verse with the preceding two verses and the allusion to Ps 110,1:25 “For it is necessary that he reign until he places his enemies under his feet.26 The last enemy to be destroyed will be death.27 For “all things has he subordinated under his feet.” Death has, in a sense, been subordinated already for Paul, and this previous subordination will result in death’s annihilation at some future time.30 The specification of the “enemies” of Ps 110,1 which takes place in vv. 24-27 indicates what is preoccupying Paul: he wishes to make clear that absolutely nothing created lies outside the scope of God’s subordination of reality to Christ.

It would seem to follow from Paul’s use of the gezera shawa that in the tradition which he was using “death” was not among the “enemies” which will be annihilated at the end of the messianic age (Ps 110,1). It is brought in from Ps 8,7 where it seems to have been understood as being among “all things” which God has “subordinated under his feet”. The time sequence is fixed: God has “subordinated all things under his feet” at some point in the past (though this past subordination is viewed as also having future relevance). Given the centrality of the resurrection for the theme of the entire passage vv. 20-28 (cf. the topic verse 20, Nuni de Christos egegertai ek nekron aparche ton kekoimemenon – “Now that Christ is risen from the dead, the first portion of those who have fallen asleep”), it seems that Paul has in mind the resurrection as the past event in which this subordination has taken place. The subordination of death has not as yet taken place as regards Ps 110,1, and when it does take place, it will be the subordination of death as regards all those who, at present, are asleep, a subordination resulting from the past subordination of death to Christ as understood in the citation of Ps 8,7.

Thus the use of Ps 110,1 in the gezera shawa construction with Ps 8,7 illumines again who Christ is: one who through the God-given subjection of personal death through his own resurrection has also been given the subjection of death as it affects all of mankind, a subjection which will be fully actualized only at the end of the messianic time with the resurrection of all men (cf. v. 22). In v. 26 death is portrayed as among the enemies of God. These enemies have no particular significance in themselves: they are simply a shorthand way of illustrating the sovereign domination of God and of Christ (cf. v. 27bc: hotan de eipe, hoti panta hypotetaktai, delon hoti

ektos tou hypotaxantos auto; ta panta – “Now when it says that everything has been subjected, this clearly excepts the one who subjects everything to him”). Nothing is excepted from this domination. The point is that death is no more powerful with regard to God’s domination and Christ’s than any other conceivable force.\(^{31}\)

Again the temporal framework should be noted. With regard to Ps 110,1, subjection is in the future. With regard to Ps 8,7, subjection is in the past. “Death”, the enemy subjected in the past (personal subjection to Christ by reason of his resurrection) is also the enemy to be subjected in the future (final subjection of death to Christ through the resurrection of all men).

**III. Ephesians 1,20-22**

The conjunction of Pss 110,1 and 8,7 is found at Eph 1,20-22:

Eph 1,20-21

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Eph 1,20-21 \quad Hen \text{ energesen en to; Christo, egeiras auton ek nekron kai kathisas en dexion, auton en tois epouraniois hyperano pases arches kai exoussias kai dunameos kai kuriotes kai pantos onomatos onomazoumenou, ou monon en to; aioni touto, alla kai en to; mellonti}
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Eph 1,22

\[
Eph 1,22 \quad kai panta hypetaxen hypo tous podas autou kai auton edoken kephalen hyper panta te, ekklesia; , , ,
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Here Pss 110,1 and 8,7 are being used in a *gezera shawa* construction in which Ps 110,1 is again being alluded to rather than cited. Ephesians can advantageously be divided into two parts: after the introductory verses (1,1-2), Part One, God’s Plan Revealed and Accomplished (1,3 – 3,21), and Part Two, Exhortations to Worthy Conduct (4,1 – 6,20).\(^{32}\) The opening verses of Part One are in turn subdivided into (A), Blessing (1,3-14); (B), Thanksgiving and Prayer of Intercession (1,15-23);

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\(^{31}\) Cf. Carr, *Angels*, 92: “It seems clear ... that Paul here is not aligning death with a series of hostile beings that he believes Christ to have conquered. He is concerned with a correct perception of the relation of the risen Lord to God, so that the Christian community may develop an appropriate response in its life within the new order that God has created and will ultimately confirm.”

Once Dead, Now Alive and Christ (2,1-10). Hence the use of Pss 110,1 and 8,7 occurs in a section concerned with thanksgiving and prayer. Vv. 20-23 are part of the prayer: the author makes use of early Christian understandings formulated in terms of Pss 110,1 and 8,7 to impress on the addressees the position to which they have been called in Christ by stressing Christ’s work and person.33

The use of Ps 110,1 here at Eph 1,20-21 is both similar to and different from the way it is used at 1 Cor 15,24-27. The word “enemies” has been removed in Ephesians, but in its place is a long list of powers which has been drawn up with an obvious concern for absolute inclusiveness: 20hen energesen en to, Christo, egeiras auton ek nekron kai kathisas en dexia, autou en tois epouraniois 21hyperano pases arches kai exousias kai dynameos kai kyriotes kai pantos onomatos onomazomenou, ou monon en to, aiono touto, alla kai en to, mellonti – “[the power] which he exercised in Christ in having raised him from the dead and in having seated him at his right hand in the heavenly sphere over every principality and ruling force and power and sovereignty and any name which can be named not only in this age but in the age to come”. What is interesting in these two verses is the mention first of Christ’s being raised by God (“[the power] which he exercised in Christ in having raised him from the dead”) and then of the forces under him in an expansion of Ps 110,1 (“and in having seated him at his right hand in the heavenly sphere over every principality and ruling force and power and sovereignty and any name which can be named not only in this age but in the age to come”). The subordination of these forces is not referred to the future, but is presented as an accomplished fact. Further, it would seem that the list of forces associated with Ps 110,1 is made not to list the “enemies” of Christ but to indicate the significance of the position granted him at his exaltation at God’s right hand, with the imagery of subordination (hyperano) being a conventional way of expressing superiority.34 Subordination with the implication of hostility seems to be left to the allusion to Ps 8,7 in v. 22: kai panta hypetaxen hypo tous podas autou … – “and all things he subordinated under his feet”.35

34. “In [Eph] 1,21 a citation of Ps 110,1 is expanded, apparently to emphasise the glory of the exalted Christ, who is now seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places” (Carr, Angels, 98).
35. “… the idea of the subjugation of all things to Christ is made explicit in this passage by the quotation of Ps 8:6 [sic: in the present paper the verse is considered to be 8:7] in verse 22. This is a second notion, distinct from the first, as is shown by the insertion of kai and by the development in verse 22 of the theme of ta panta, which is taken from Ps 8” (Carr, Angels, 98).
Despite the temporal levelling in Eph 1,20-22 between Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7 induced by the author’s perspective, the functions of the allusions are different, with Ps 110,1 referring to Christ’s relation to God, and Ps 8,7 referring to God’s different subordinating of all things to Christ, with the “all things” being kept independent of the list of powers associated with Ps 110,1 in the previous verse. The phrase “all things” of Ps 8,7 seems to be developed in the second part of v. 22 where it is related to Christ’s being made the head of the Church: Kai auton edoken kephalen hyper panta te, ekklesia, – “and he gave him as head over all things to the Church. This repetition of the word panta is in some way related to the “all things” (panta) which were subjected to him as indicated in the citation from Ps 8,7. V. 23 then goes on: hetis estin to soma autou, to pleroma tou ta panta en pasin pleroumenou – “which is his body, the fullness of him who fulfills all things in all”. The mention of soma after the use of a word from Ps 8,7, a verse elsewhere associated with the resurrection, suggests that n v. 23 Christ’s power over death is here being shared with the Church, which is here considered as Christ’s body. This is confirmed by the function of v. 23 as a transition verse to what follows in chapter 2.

Chapter 2 is about the spiritual death of the addressees from which they have been rescued by Christ’s resurrection and exaltation (cf. 2,6). The allusion to Ps 110,1 at Eph 2,6 – the use of the word synekathisen – may be taken as a confirmation of this relevance. At Eph 2,6 it is paired with the word synegeiren. Here, in miniature, is a midrash of the pairing of Pss 110, and 8,7 prepared for by 1,20-22: “God, rich as he is in mercy, an account of the great love with which he loved us (for you are saved by grace), made us alive together with Christ, dead because of our offenses as we were, and he both raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly sphere in Christ Jesus” (2,4-6). In order to accommodate a present spiritual meaning the future relevance of the supremacy of Christ has been brought into that present, and the relevance of the future resurrection of the faithful based on Christ’s past resurrection, as well. Thus even in summary the two psalms are kept distinct: the

36. “The sequence of thought, then, is two fold: the glory of Christ and his acceptance by God is expressed through the testimony of Ps 110; the subjugation of all things to Christ is expressed by the development of Ps 8” (ibid.).
37. Noted by Hay, Glory, 164.
38. “Here as in Col 2,12; 3,1-4 the use of the past tense shows that the resurrection and triumph of Christians in heaven is considered as actually existing, whereas the future tense in Rm 6,3-11; 8,11-17 seq., treats it as something that has still to take place. Treating the eschatological reality as already existing is a characteristic of the captivity epistles” (The New Jerusalem Bible [Darton Longman & Todd; London 1985], 1935 [note “e” for Eph 2,6]).
allusion to Ps 8,7 – synegeiren – is placed before the allusion to Ps 110,1 – synekathisen – because it builds on the idea of spiritual resurrection implied in the preceding verse, 2,5. The allusion to Ps 110,1 must be understood then, in the context of the pairing of the verses through gezera shawa, as an indication in the sharing in the absolute supremacy of Christ with God over all things.


In Acts 2,25c and 2,34d a gezera shawa seems to be used to link Ps 16[15], 1-8 and Ps 110,1 in a speech of Peter. The linking phrase is ek dexion mou;

Acts 2,25 Prooromen ton kyrion enopion mou dia pantos, hoti ek dexion mou estin hina me saleutho.


These two passages are part of the Pentecost sermon of Peter which occurs after the Pentecost event at Acts 2,14-41. The sermon begins (1) with an introduction relating the sermon to the narrative framework and consists largely in a long citation from the prophet Joel concerning the advent of the Spirit (vv. 14-21). There follows (2) the kerygma concerning Jesus, with arguments from Scripture (vv. 22-36). At the end (3) comes a call to repentance and conversion based on the kerygma (vv. 38-39).

The use of the two psalm citations comes, then, in a passage about the kerygma

39. The occurrence of gezera shawa at the Pentecost discourse of Peter was pointed out to me by my student, Elaine Classen, in her dissertation “To You is the Promise: A Rhetorical-Exegetical Analysis of Acts 2 in the Context of Luke-Acts”, defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1994. In this identification she follows R. N. Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids 1975 [second printing, 1977]) 97. The use made in the present article of this gezera shawa is the responsibility of the present writer, and not of Dr. Classen. On the linking of the two psalms through the common imagery of the “right hand” (but without use of the gezera shawa construction) see now G. J. Steyn, Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 12; Pharos; Kampen 1995), 121, n. 315.


concerning Jesus. This kerygma concerning Jesus follows hard on the citation from Joel about the Spirit which sets the speech in the context of the Pentecost event (vv. 1-13). The passage proclaiming the kerygma (vv. 2-36) is divided into two parts. Part One (vv. 22-32) speaks of "Jesus the Nazarene" and has as its centerpiece a long quotation from Ps 16,8-11. Part Two (v. 33-35) is centred around the citation of Ps 110,1 and concerns the exaltation of this same Jesus.

Part One turns on the resurrection of Jesus: the body of David has been in the midst of Israel up to the present, whereas the body of Jesus has been raised. V. 32 is a summary: "God raised up this Jesus, and of this we are all witnesses". The use of the phrase ek dexion mou from Ps 16,8 at Acts 2,25 refers to the right hand of Christ in relation to God: "I kept the Lord before me through it all, for he is at my right hand lest I be shaken".

The phrase ek dexion mou is picked up at Acts 2,33 with the words tei dexiai, oun tou theou at the beginning of Part Two of the kerygma about Jesus: tei dexiai, oun tou theou hypsotheis, ten te epaggelian tou pneumatos tou hagiou labon para tou patros, execheen touto ho hymei kai blepete kai akouete — "Now after being raised to the right hand of God and having received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out what you see and hear". This allusion to Ps 110,1 introduces the theme of the Lordship of the Christ which is developed in Part Two. Part Two is couched in the language of exaltation — cf. the use of the Verb hypsoo together with the imagery of the right hand in v. 33. The function of Ps 110 is to

42. The function of Ps 16 in the text of Acts is to adduce a Scriptural argument for the appropriateness of the resurrection stated as a fact in 2,24. Cf. Dillon "Acts", §44:25 (p. 733). Dillon points out that the Ps 16 has the same function in Acts 13,34-37 in a speech of Paul.

43. Two allusions are possibly indicated here, to Ps 118,16 or to Ps 110,1, as noted by The Bible of Jerusalem: "Words borrowed from Ps 118 (v. 16 LXX 'The right hand of the Lord has raised me up') used in their preaching by the apostles who took it to be messianic: 4,11; Mt 21,9 and par., 42 and par.; Lk 13,35' Jn 12,13; Heb 13,6; 1 P 2,7. But it is possible to translate 'Having been raised up to the right hand of God' and to see in this an introduction to the quotation (v. 34) of Ps 110,1 which is another theme of apostolic preaching: 7,55,56; Mt 22,44 and pr.; 26,64 and pr.; Mk 16,19; Rm 8,34; 1 Co 15,25; Eph 1,20; Col 3,1; Heb 13,13; 8,1; 10,12; 12,2; 1 P 3,22" (The Jerusalem Bible, 1803 [note "t" for Acts 2,33]). An allusion to Ps 110,1 is more probable than an allusion to Ps 118,16, given not only the proximity of the citation to Ps 110,1 in the following verse, but the necessity of adjusting the imagery of Ps 16,8, where God is at the right hand of the Christ, to the imagery of Ps 110,1, where Christ is at the right hand of God. Above all, the relevance of Acts 5,31 seems much more convincing for the interpretation of Acts 2,33 than Acts 4,11 by reason of the conjunction of the verb hypsoo and the dative tei dexiai at both Acts 2,33 and Acts 5,31. (Cf. the following note.)
show that the ascended (i.e., exalted) one – Jesus – is Kyrios.45

The two psalm citations, when used in conjunction as part of a gezera shawa construction, show the attestation of Scripture that the one and the same Jesus is the Kyrios (Ps 110) who has died and risen (Ps 16). Thus the summary of vv. 22-34 given at v. 35: asphalos oun ginosketo pas oikos Israel hoti kai kyrion auton kai Christon epoiesen ho theos, touton ton Iesoun hon hymeis estaurosate – “Let Israel regards as certain, therefore, that God has made both Lord himself and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified”.

With regard to the time frame implied by the use of Pss 110,1 and 16,8, Ps 16 refers to the past (Christ’s resurrection expressed in terms of non-corruption) and Ps 110 refers to the future (the usual allusion to the enemies).

44. The same linking of hypsoo with the right hand imagery is found at Acts 5,31, again in a speech of Peter. Acts 5,31 is among the texts given by Hay (164) as containing an allusion to Ps 110,1. Hypsoo is also a word used in the Fourth Gospel to express the exaltation of Jesus (cf. Jn 3,14; 8,28; 12,32.34).

45. “Peter’s case is not that Ps 110,1 proves the exaltation, for that is now a matter of empirical evidence (v. 33c); it is rather that the Exalted is the one whom Israel’s prophet-king named Kyrios (cf. Mark 12,35-37 par....)” (Dillon, §44:26 [p. 734]). This implies that the subjection of the “enemies” in the citation of Ps 110,1 has a minor role, if any, in the context. Dillon (ibid.) thinks that the enemies refer in the context to “all the house of Israel” in v. 36: “35. until I make your enemies: These words of the psalm verse reintroduce Peter’s audience, ‘the whole house of Israel’ (v. 36), grimly known to Luke’s readers as violent adversary of all the prophets, including the Messiah (7,51; Luke 11,47-51; 13,33-35)”. This interpretation assumes a certain plausibility in the light of Acts 5,31 and the association of “at his (sc., God’s) right hand” with a call to “Israel” to repent issued by Peter. (At Acts 2,37-42 the call to repentance is accepted by some of the listeners.) But it seems improbable that subjugation under Jesus’ feet is the proper way to describe a penitent sinner, because the image of subjection suggests continuing contrariety of will: the person placed under Jesus’ feet is there because of his pervasive, unrepented enmity to Jesus. Rather, the use of “enemies” in Ps 110,1 at Acts 2,35 would again seem to be a formula used primarily to indicate the relation of the Kyrios of God. Cf. Hay (47): “It would appear that the psalm was chiefly employed to supply symbolic language and arguments for intrachurch communications. Ps 110.1a is cited to argue for the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of certain titles for the messiah (Mk 12,35-37 = Mt 22,41-46 = Lk 20,41-44; Barn 12,10-11). Although these arguments could be meaningful to outsiders, they were probably used mainly for discussion within the church.” The point of Ps 110,1 in the context of Acts 2,22-36, in other words, is primarily to establish the relation of Jesus with God as Kyrios.
V. Conclusions

The use of Ps 110,1 in the four passages above shows certain patterns.

1) The fact that Ps 110,1 is used in such varied works as Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Acts would seem to indicate that it was a recognized part of a widespread, early Christian tradition with regard to establishing the identity of Jesus.46

2) The use of Ps 110,1 in conjunction with Ps 8,7 in three of the above texts – Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians – shows that such use also had something distinctive to say about the identity of Jesus.47

3) The “enemies” referred to in the citation of Ps 110,1 in Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Acts seem to be of secondary importance in the function of the psalm in these passages: Ps 110,1 is cited not primarily to indicate the identity of the enemies subjugated but the fact of subjugation and thus the status of Jesus with relation to God.48

4) The time values of Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7 with regard to subjection are consistently different: Ps 110,1 refers to a subjection already accomplished.49 In Ephesians, of course, the time value is deliberately erased in order to portray the spiritual status of the addressees as being already achieved.50 But this should serve to indicate that the time difference was something which was considered established and significant in the tradition.

5) In the pairing of Ps 110,1 with Ps 8,7 (three times) and Ps 16, Ps 110 seems to be used consistently in contrast to the paired psalm. Ps 8,7 and Ps 16 refer to death in some way, either as having been subjected already under the feet of Jesus.

46. The use by Jesus of Ps 110,1 as reflected in the synoptic gospel traditions would seem to indicate that the psalm was regarded as having crucial importance. Cf. above, n. 5.
47. Cf. Hay, Glory, 35. “The tandem appearance of the two psalm passages in 1 Cor 15,25-27; Eph 1,20-22; Heb 1,13 – 2,8 shows that other Christian writers detected a connection between them”. Hay (ibid.) also notes the apparent conflation in Matthew and Mark of Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7 a conflation which seems to indicate a fixed place in tradition: “The quotations [sc., of Ps 110,1] in Mk 12,36 an Mt 22,44 read hypokato where the O[ld] G[reek] has hypopodion. The other quotation of Ps 110,1 read hypopodium. This deviation in Mark and Matthew may betoken the use of different versions, but more probably it reflects conflation of Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7 (which concludes panta hyptaxes hypokato ton podon autou).”
48. Cf. above, notes 16, 17, 29, 31, 34, 36, 45. The use of Ps 110,1 in 1 Cor 15 would seem to confirm this view of the “enemies” envisioned normally when Ps 110,1 is invoked because in 1 Cor 15 an enemy, “death” is brought in from the conjoined Ps 8,7 in order to make a point about subjection in a specific case.
50. Cf. above, n. 36.
(Ps 8,7) or as not affecting Jesus with bodily corruption (Ps 16,8-11). This death is portrayed as something Jesus has personally undergone and conquered through his resurrection, even if this victory has yet to be realized by his followers (except for the proleptic use with regard to spiritual death in Ephesians).

It is in the use of Ps 110,1 in a gezera shawa construction that the above five patterns must be interpreted: 1) the consistency of Ps 110,1 as representing a recognized, widespread, and early tradition with regard to establishing the identity of Jesus; 2) the consistency of Ps 110,1 as saying something distinctive about the identity of Jesus; 3) the consistency of Ps 110,1 as saying something about the relation of Jesus to God through the imagery of subjection; 4) the consistency of Ps 110,1 as saying something about a future subjection in establishing the relation of Jesus to God; 5) the consistency of Ps 110,1 as standing in contrast with a text representing Jesus’ past subjection death.

The Epistle to the Hebrews would seem to offer the most instructive example of Ps 110,1 in the gezera shawa construction, but what is said of Ps 110,1 there is applicable, mutatis mutandis, to its use in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Acts. The author of Hebrews is using Ps 110,1 as part of a recognized, widespread tradition (Pattern 1) in order to say something distinctive about the identity of Jesus (Pattern 2) with regard to the relation of Jesus to God (Pattern 3). And here is where the gezera shawa tradition must be invoked with appropriate care: in citing Ps 110,1 with regard to a future subjugation (Pattern 4) in a deliberately stylized contrast with a past subjugation of death (Pattern 5), the author of Hebrews wishes to imply that death is a past subjugation for Jesus and that this past subjugation does not involve the statement he wishes to make about the future subjugation spoken of in Ps 110,1, a subjugation by which the relation of Jesus to God is ascertained. Death is accordingly outside the purview of Ps 110,1 precisely as such, even though the death of Jesus is an essential element in the proper understanding of who Jesus is. This, then, is the suggestion being offered in the present paper: that the use of Ps 110,1 in Heb 1,13; 1 Cor 15,25; 25; Eph 1,21-22; and Acts 2,34-35 would seem to indicate on the part of the authors the conscious use of the supposition that Jesus in relation to God does not die even though, in a sense, he does die. From this supposition it would seem to follow that Jesus is in some sense divine, on a par with God in that he is beyond death. In Hebrews this supposition is supported by Heb 2,14, where the author gives evidence of his awareness that Jesus must take on

51. Cf. above, n. 22.
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blood and flesh if he is to die. Further, in Hebrews, this interpretation is supported by the view that Heb 1,5-14 is establishing the identity of Jesus as “Son [of God]”, with Ps 110,1 offered as the text which clinches the argument.

The gezera shawa construction involving Ps 110,1 and Ps 8,7/16,8-11 is a way, then, of expressing in New Testament modes of thinking what later Christian teaching would regard as the two “natures” of Jesus united in his one “person”. The divine aspect is conveyed by Jesus’ not dying and being enthroned at God’s “right hand”,52 while the human aspect is conveyed by the simultaneous death of Jesus. Although it would be anachronistic to speak of “person” and “nature” with regard to Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament, a basis for such a distinction would seem to be present in the New Testament’s use of Ps 110,1.53

These are weighty matters, and the above suggestion is offered with a certain amount of hesitation. But the basis for the suggestion would not seem to be lacking when the appropriate New Testament texts are viewed in the perspective of a Christian tradition under the guidance of the Spirit.

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52. “In ancient paganism and Judaism generally the right side symbolized potency and honour. Long before the Christian era pagans spoke of kings and gods exalted to thrones at the right of other gods, and they sometimes described bliss after death in terms of a right-hand location. The Hebrew scriptures and later Jewish writings spoke of men and supernatural beings gaining right-hand or heavenly thrones, often without implying that any particular function was linked with such elevation. The notions of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God and of his followers gaining similar honour seem to have widely fired the imaginations of early Christians. This development may be attributed in part to the use of Ps 110,1, but it must have been encouraged by the fact that wholly apart from the psalm such notions would be richly meaningful to contemporary pagans and Jews” (Hay, Glory, 58).

53. The Letter of Barnabas at 12,10b-11a uses Ps 110,1 in a gezera shawa construction with Is 45,1 to show that Jesus is Son of God to the exclusion of any humanity. In the passage leading up to the gezera shawa Barnabas shows that he does not look on Jesus as “son of man” but as “Son of God”, i.e. Barnabas is docetist. He evokes Ps 110,1 to show Jesus’ dominion over his enemies, while Is 45,1 to show that he dominates the gentiles. Cf. P. Pringent – R. A. Kraft, Épître de Barnabé (Sources chrétiennes, 172; Cerf, Paris 1971) 172 and 174; P. Prigent, Les testimony dans le christianisme primitif. L’Épître de Barnabé I-XVI et ses sources (Études bibliques; Gabalda, Paris 1961), 125-26.