

Messiah – Who is He?

THE STUDENTS were unhappy. “Well, I thought he was the lecturer!” one snorted. “You only asked him about that paragraph in the textbook and he was flummoxed. Talk about ‘the blind leading the blind’: he hadn’t a clue”..

This critical phrase ‘blind leading the blind’ comes from graphic words of Jesus about religious leaders in Israel.

Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:14).

Later, in Matthew chapter 23, Jesus uses the word ‘blind’ five times when warning about such people. This is because, tragically, they refused to believe the stark evidence of their own eyes about who Jesus was. Moreover, despite supposedly being experts in the Jewish scriptures, they too were unable to answer the questions which Jesus asked them. One question was about this verse:

The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool’ (Psalm 110:1).

Son of David

Psalms 110 was written by King David, about his descendant Jesus, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament, which indicates its significance.

In using this verse Jesus confirmed two things: that the words were penned by David, and that they refer to the Christ – the Messiah (i.e. to Jesus himself). Clearly then, in this verse ‘The LORD’ is Almighty God and ‘my lord’ is Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus’ question to them is recorded in three of the four gospels (Matthew 22:41–45, see v 44; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44), and afterwards the dumbfounded leaders dared not ask him any more questions (Matthew 22:46).

Great King

Through the words of this psalm even great King David acknowledged the complete supremacy of his descendant who would be Christ the King (Psalm 110:2; Luke 1:32). This was contrary to Jewish custom, where ancestors were always viewed as superior. So the verse was a problem for the Pharisees, whose prejudices made them antagonistic to Jesus of Nazareth.

The apostle Peter quoted the exact same verse (Acts 2:34–35), making a strong and conclusive case to the people and to their leaders that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the Messiah’s brief in every detail (Acts 2:22–36). It is quoted again in the letter to the Hebrews in support of the same teaching (Hebrews 1:5–14; see verse 13), showing very clearly that Jesus is superior to every other human being and also to the angels.

No other human being has either been given divine nature (1 Corinthians 15:22–23) or has ascended to heaven (John 3:13). As evidence of this, even the dead body of David, a man ‘after God’s own heart’ (Acts 13:22), was in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29). The fact that Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand is so important and awe–inspiring that it is referred to in a further 12 passages in the New Testament.

Great Priest

Psalm 110:4 is also quoted extensively:

The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Psalm 110:4).

This occurs word–for–word in Hebrews (5:6; 7:17 & 21), and is also alluded to (Hebrews 5:10; 6:20), proving the unique role of Jesus as priest. Jesus is a priest for ever and so was different from the priests under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 7:19–27). This fact about Jesus is so crucial that God ‘swears and will not relent’ (Psalm 110:4). Jesus is superior to and supersedes all other priests because his sacrifice has opened up the way for believers to be saved from eternal death. No one else did or could do this.

These are awesome truths about Jesus Christ and they show how the New Testament gospel is inextricably based on the Old Testament writings. We cannot fully comprehend the inspired words of Jesus or the apostles without understanding the scriptures to which they are referring.

Seeing the Christ – Now and in the Future

Given its importance in the New Testament, it is therefore important to read the whole of Psalm 110. In addition to the words about the supremacy of the Christ, it contains very powerful language about him. He has God’s authority to exercise unassailable power.

There will be no hope for the enemies of this triumphant ruler when he returns – all his enemies will be subdued. This fact is also referred to several times in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20–22 and Hebrews 10:13).

A common image of Jesus is of a ‘meek and mild’ man who would ‘not hurt a fly’. This does not agree with this psalm’s picture of an immortal, supreme king, ruling with great power, putting down opposition with the full authority of God. One writer summarised the psalm as “Beware! He’s coming”.

Of course, everything Jesus will do will be right and completely just, but we must be careful to ensure that we are his friends, not his enemies. This means doing what he asked of us (John 15:14). We can only see and obey Jesus properly by reading the whole Bible for ourselves, avoiding the teaching of ‘blind leaders’. We then need to believe what it says and to prepare for his coming.

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