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December 14th: Psalms 108 & 110 & Revelation 6

December 13, 2020



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"Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." The opening of the first six seals.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Psalms 108, a song, a Psalm of David. My heart is steadfast, O God. I will sing and make melody with all my being.

Awake, O harp and lyre, I will awake the dawn. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations.

For your steadfast love is great above the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth, that your beloved ones may be delivered. Give salvation by your right hand and answer me. God has promised in his holiness.

With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the valley of Sukkoth. Gilead is

mine, Manasseh is mine, Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter, Moab is my washbasin. Upon Edom I cast my shoe.

Over Philistia I shout in triumph. Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go out, O God, with our armies. O grant us help against the foe.

For vain is the salvation of man. With God we shall do valiantly. It is he who will tread down our foes.

The opening five verses of Psalm 108 are almost taken verbatim from Psalm 57 verses 7-11. Verses 6-13, the rest of the psalm, are taken almost verbatim from Psalm 60 verses 5-12. Nevertheless, while they both fit in their original context, they also fit here.

More surprisingly, here the psalm is naturally divided between verses 1-6 and verses 7-13, which doesn't correspond with the original division, as John Goldengay has remarked. Also, the ordering of the psalm has changed. As it begins where Psalm 57 ended, it moves not from plea to praise, but more from praise to plea.

It's likely a later remixing of material from earlier Davidic psalms. It begins with a statement of commitment to make praise to the Lord. This praise arises from the joy of the heart.

The psalmist will be making melody with his entire being. And he calls for the harp and the lyre to wake up. Perhaps he has in mind here the musicians playing these instruments.

He also wants to wake up the dawn. While the dawn itself generally wakes people up, he wants to wake up the dawn because he can't wait to begin this praise of God. His desire is to give thanks to the Lord among the peoples.

This is going to be for a wider audience, singing praises among the nations, not just to the congregation of Israel to spur them to praise. The declaration of the Lord here seems to be a more general statement of who God is. His steadfast love is great above the heavens, his faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

And yet this is a basis for petition. The Lord is high and exalted and great in this manner. But the psalmist is calling for the Lord to demonstrate this, to prove this in the sight of the nations.

The Lord will lift up his name as he delivers his people and achieves salvation by his right hand in a way that demonstrates his might. In verse 7 there is a sudden change of the scene. God has promised in his holiness in the past, a great and solemn oath by his very nature and this is a promise concerning the land.

He will divide up Shechem and portion out the valley of Sukkoth. Shechem is a key location in the promised land and the valley of Sukkoth such a place within the Transjordan. This reference to the totality of the land both the land of the Transjordan and the land of the promised land continues in verse 8. Gilead is his, Manasseh is his.

Gilead is in the Transjordan and Manasseh was the greatest of the tribes within the Transjordan, half of the tribe of Manasseh within that realm. Ephraim and Judah are described as God's helmet and his scepter. Judah is the scepter, the means by which rule takes place.

Ephraim is the helmet, offering powerful protection. Both of these tribes are in the land across the Jordan, in the promised land proper and the Lord achieves his victories by means of these instruments. He dresses and equips himself with these tribes as it were to achieve his conquest over his foes.

If God as it were dresses himself with the tribes of Israel as the means by which he will achieve his victories he shows similar power over the surrounding nations but in a different manner. Moab is as it were God's wash basin. Once he has won his victory he washes himself in Moab.

Upon Edom he casts his shoe as he takes it off after the battle. He stands over Philistia and shouts in triumph at his success. Verse 10 presents God eager for another battle, asking who is going to lead him up to fight against Edom.

However, despite the great power that the psalmist describes here, Israel does not seem to have been successful in its recent wars. God this great warrior has not actually accompanied his people in their fight. Judah may indeed be God's scepter and Ephraim may be his helmet, but they are only effective when God is wielding them.

If they are not wielded by the Lord, what use are they? Indeed it will only be with God that they will achieve the victories that they seek. He is the one, as the psalmist says, that will tread down their foes. Psalm 110, a Psalm of David.

Psalm 110 is one of the most famous psalms in all of the Psalter. The opening verse of this psalm is the most quoted verse from the Old Testament and the New, and verse four is the subject of extended theological reflection in the book of Hebrews. The psalm opens with an utterance of the Lord to the king.

The king is summoned to sit at the Lord's right hand, a place of great authority and power. The one sitting at the right hand of the throne is the one who administrates the power of that throne. The Lord is the king of his people, but the Davidic king serves as his son.

The actual exercise of God's reign of authority occurs in large measure through the agency of the Davidic king. The Lord is going to achieve his supremacy through the king.

He will make the enemies of David as if the footstool for his throne.

Placing one's feet upon conquered enemies is a sign of power at various points in scripture. Such enemies have been so completely dominated that they become part of the structure of the throne itself, the footstool. The Lord will place the enemies under him.

The Lord will also send out his power over the surrounding nations. His enemies will be made his footstool and he will rule in the midst of his enemies. The Lord will also make him effective in making his people willing.

On the day of battle, his people will freely offer themselves. This is language that we find also in Judges chapter 5 verse 2 in the Song of Deborah. That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, blessed the Lord.

The most effective rulers do not need to rule their people by means of terror or fear. They rule them by means of love and this is the case for this Davidic king. He has the hearts of his people and they will follow him willingly and joyfully.

The rest of verse 3 is difficult to understand. The reference to holy garments or holy splendour recalls language that is generally used of the Lord. This army will bear something of the holy and glorious character of God.

The womb of the morning and the Jew of the youth may perhaps refer to the freshness of the military force led by this king. Alternatively, it might have a similar meaning to the expression that we see in 2 Samuel chapter 17 verse 12. So we shall come upon him in some place where he is to be found, and we shall light upon him as the Jew falls on the ground.

And of him and all the men with him not one will be left. In verse 4 we arrive at a section that parallels verse 1. The psalm had started with a statement of the Lord to the king. Now there is a more solemn oath from the Lord concerning the king.

He will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the priest king of Salem, a figure we encounter after Abraham returns after his defeat of the kings. He gives Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoil.

The fact that Melchizedek is the king of Salem or Jerusalem gives him an added significance. David, when he conquers Jerusalem, takes the throne that was once the throne of Melchizedek. The joining together of priestly and kingly elements within the one person is something that is generally resisted in scripture.

The priests had their responsibilities in the temple and the king had responsibilities elsewhere. Yet for David and his descendants there were many ways in which their role as king overlapped with or moved towards the role of a priest. The king's palace was

associated with the temple, they were part of the same complex of buildings.

The king could intercede for and lead the people in worship, as we see in Solomon and his inauguration of the temple. Later in scripture in the book of Zechariah chapter 3 and 6 there is reference to the joining together of the roles of priest and king. Although the Davidic king had some sort of role within the worship of the people, leading them and blessing them and praying for them, there is an anticipation that that role will become something more permanent and something more extensive.

And this psalm has been seen as a messianic one, one that points forward to a greater than David. Jesus himself uses it in this way as he refers to the fact that although it is a psalm of David, David refers to one, who seems to be his son, as his lord. How can he be his lord if he is his son? The lord is at the right hand of the king, he is the one who makes the king effective in his rule.

Through the king, the lord exerts his power over the nations, showing his dominance over all the peoples that would rise up against him. The action here, although achieved through the king, is described as the lord's own action. The subject of the final verse is a matter of some debate, it seems to be ambiguous.

Is it the lord who will drink from the brook by the way, or is it the king? And what is the meaning of this action? Golden Gay raises the possibility that this is an allusion to part of the coronation ceremony that we read of in 1 Kings 1 in the case of Solomon. Alternatively, the brook might bring to mind the blessing of the lord upon the land in giving rains so that there is abundant water to drink. In both the dew of youth and drinking from the brook, water is seen as refreshing, something that brings youth.

This psalm is used frequently within the New Testament to refer to the ascension of Christ. Christ has been lifted up to sit at the right hand of the father and he will reign until all enemies are put under his feet. He is the new Davidic king who brings together the role of priest and king within himself.

A question to consider, what are some of the reasons why reading the story of Genesis chapter 14 we might recognise Melchizedek to be a character of special note and importance? There came another horse, bright red. His rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine. When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine, and with pestilence, and by wild beasts of the earth. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for the witness they had borne.

They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then they were each given a white robe, and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as the fig-tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Then the kings of the earth, and the great ones, and the generals, and the rich, and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves, and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? Now that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb, has arrived, and taken up his position at the right hand of God, the book can be opened, and the prophecy concerning the events of the age to come put in motion. The Lamb is the one who is worthy to open the book's seven seals, from which the rest of the events of the book will unfold.

The number seven is an important one in scripture more generally. The scriptures begin with the seven days of creation, and the repeated sevens of revelation are ushering in a new creation. There are the seven messages to the churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls.

Sevenfold patterns are found at various points in scripture. Beyond Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 2 follows a modified seven-day pattern. The instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus follow a seven-day pattern.

John chapters 1 and 2 have a seven-day pattern, and it is possible that Jesus' signs in the gospel of John also follow such a pattern. The three sets of seven in the judgments and revelation, the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, have some possible points of more specific contact with the order of God's works on the seven days of creation. For the most part, the connections are less pronounced, but occasionally some more obvious connection will stand out.

We might see some relationships with the plagues of Egypt at certain points too. Peter Lighthouse proposes the following connections. The first seal is the dazzling white horse

which is like the light on the first day of creation.

The second, the red horse that divides and separates, is like the day two firmament. The third seal involves events concerning the grain and fruit trees which spring up on the third day. In the fourth seal, death and Hades are given authority over the earth like the sun, moon, and stars on day four of creation.

On the fifth seal, the saints below the altar are like the swarms created on day five. They are also given white robes as the priest's garments were associated with day five of the creation pattern in the book of Exodus. The sixth seal is associated with doomed humanity as humanity was created on the sixth day of creation.

The opening of the seventh seal leads to half an hour's silence in heaven and the prayers of the altar of incense, both things that could be connected with Sabbath. Austen Farrer notes the parallel between the seven stars that were in the hand of Jesus in chapter 1 verse 16, corresponding with the angels of the seven churches, as verse 20 of that chapter makes clear, and the seven seals in his hand now. The messages of chapters 2 and 3 were given as Jesus addressed the seven angels in his hand one by one.

Now he will open the seven seals in his hand one by one. Chapter 6 contains the opening of the first six of the seven seals, after which there is a pause before the seventh is opened. The first four of the seven seals involve the arrival of a rider upon a horse, announced by the voice of one of the four living creatures.

The horses likely find their background in the visions of Zachariah. In Zachariah chapter 1 verses 7 to 10 we read, On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zachariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, I saw in the night, and behold a man riding on a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red sorrel and white horses.

Then I said, What are these, my lord? The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what they are. So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth. We see more about these in Zachariah chapter 6 verses 1 to 7. Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze.

The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said to me, These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes towards the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go towards the south country.

When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth. And he said, Go, patrol the earth. So they patrolled the earth.

The horses are associated among other things with the four winds of heaven. The lamb has just gone up to the right hand of the enthronement, to the throne of God. This might be seen as the event of the ascension.

After the ascension, the seven spirits are sent out into all of the earth, and the events of the last days begin to play out. The events of chapter 6 present in the form of visionary and apocalyptic symbol what occurs after the ascension and through the events of Pentecost and the years that immediately follow. God is shaking up the world.

He is progressively unleashing the winds and fire of heaven upon it. The opening of the seals also fulfills events foretold in the Olivet discourse and in Peter's Pentecost speech. Matthew 24, verses 6-8 reads, And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place. But the end is not yet, for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. The seals are the beginning of the birth pangs described here in the Olivet discourse. They are not the end itself.

Rather they are an unsettling of the old world order upon its foundations. Acts chapter 2, verses 17-20 has more along these lines. And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy, and I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. Lighthouse stresses that the seals are not the actual prophecy that is coming to pass.

Rather they are preparatory for the fulfillment of the prophecy of the end. The scroll or book can't be read until all of its seals have been opened. The judgments are written down, but they can't be put into effect until the seven seals have been opened and the seven trumpets have been blown.

The opening of the first four seals exhibits a largely repeating pattern. First, the lamb opens the seal. Second, John hears one of the four living creatures.

Third, one of the four living creatures says, Come. Fourth, John looks and behold. And fifth, a horse comes with a rider upon it.

There are seven seals, but these first four are very similar so we have a pattern of four and three. The horses and the horsemen are sent out by God. With the prophecy of Zachariah as background, the horsemen seem to be agents of God seated or perhaps even enthroned upon their horses.

These are not demons. We need to settle the identity of both the horses and the horsemen as we think through this. The advent of each horse and rider is heralded by one of the living creatures, each in succession, declaring Come.

This should be seen as shorthand for the expression Come Lord Jesus. It's the call for Christ to come in judgment and salvation. Lighthouse raises the possibility that the riders could be seen as four different responses to the calls of the living creatures to Jesus to come.

Jesus, or the Spirit of Christ, is the four horsemen. Later in chapter 19, Jesus is presented as the rider on the white horse. And perhaps we can see allusions to elements of the other three horsemen's work in his description.

Revelation chapter 19 verses 11-16 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Perhaps we are to see the church itself in the horses.

The opening of the first seal at the very beginning of the chapter is heralded by a voice like thunder from one of the living creatures. This would seem to be the first living creature, which is the lion. The white horse that comes out, comes out as a conqueror.

He bears a bow and also a crown. If indeed this is Christ as described in Revelation chapter 19, the conquering may be the conquering of the gospel. Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and his word of his gospel is proving victorious wherever it goes in the world.

People are hearing and receiving it and rejecting the kingdom of Satan. The opening of the second seal brings conflict. It is announced by the second living creature, the ox, and the horse that comes is bright red, red like fire and red like blood.

Christ is casting fire to earth in judgment, and blood in conflict and judgment will also follow his coming. The gospel brings a sword. It puts people against members of their own households.

This is part of the prophecy in Matthew chapter 24 in the Olivet Discourse. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

The opening of the third seal is heralded by the third living creature. Once again he calls come. He is calling for the advent of Christ.

This time the horse is black, perhaps associated with famine and death. The wheat and the barley are struck, but the oil and wine are not. Some, such as David Chilton, have looked for a literal fulfillment of this in the final days of Jerusalem.

While there was indeed severe famine, the reference here might not be to literal types of foods, but to different peoples. The oil and wine are associated with the new covenant. They connote rest, anointing, and reward.

The opening of the fourth seal leads to the coming of a fourth horse, the pale horse, a horse ridden by death himself with Hades in the wake. This horse is heralded by the fourth of the living creatures, the eagle. The correspondence of the living creatures as those who herald these different horses maybe suggests that there is some sort of way in which the horses are their counterparts.

The horses also seem to be associated with the four winds of heaven, much as the four living creatures are associated with the four points of the compass. With the opening of the fifth seal, the pattern changes. The opening of the seal is not announced by one of the living creatures.

Rather, we see the souls of those who have been slain for the word of God beneath the altar. The altar is associated with the earth. The altar is before the temple, it is not within the actual building itself.

The building represents the heaven. The courtyard represents the earth. The land is associated with the altar, and the lava is associated with the sea.

Whereas in the opening of the first four seals it was the living creatures that were saying come. Here it is the saints who are saying Maranatha, calling for Christ to come in judgment and deliverance. Their souls are beneath the altar because their souls are associated with the pouring out of their blood.

The blood for purification offerings as we see in the book of Leviticus had to be poured out at the base of the altar. There is a sacrificial movement in play here, but it is not yet

completed. Their calling for judgment and vengeance upon those who dwell upon the earth is a call for the sacrifice to be completed.

They are given white robes that anticipate their victory, but they are also instructed to wait until the full measure of their fellow servants and their brothers are complete. The full numbers of the martyrs have not yet been reached. Our mind should naturally turn here to Matthew chapter 23 verses 34-35.

The opening of the sixth seal is heralded by a great earthquake and the sun becoming black as sackcloth, the moon becoming like blood. Austin Farris suggests that we should pay attention to the colours here. We have had a white horse for victory, red horse for bloodshed, black horse for famine, and then a livid or green horse for pestilence.

And then the four horses and their colours are paralleled with elements of the next part of the seals. First there are white robes for victory, associated with the white horse for victory. Then there is an earthquake and the sun made black as sackcloth and the moon as blood.

Black and red like the second and third horses for famine and bloodshed. And finally there are seven new plagues which begin with a plague upon a third of the earth and upon the green grass, which would match with the green horse and the plagues upon a fourth of the earth. Cosmic symbolism of the lights of heaven being turned out, the heavens being rolled up like a scroll and things falling from heaven should all be familiar to us from the Old Testament.

We also see such language in Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24.29 for instance. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Similar language to this prophecy is used in Isaiah chapter 34 verse 3. All the host of heaven shall rot away and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. The whole order of creation is being torn apart or unsettled here.

The ground is being unsettled through the earthquake. The sun is being made black, the moon like blood, the stars falling from the heavens and the sky being rolled up like a scroll. Mountains are being moved out of place and islands too.

The whole of the cosmic order, which symbolises nations and rulers and authorities and powers, is being put out of joint. As the seals are being opened in preparation for the finale that follows, everything is being shaken up. People try to flee but there is nowhere to hide.

The wrath of the Lamb is coming upon the earth. We ought to attend to the expression

the wrath of the Lamb. We don't usually think about lambs having anger but this is no ordinary lamb.

This lamb is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Like the beasts of the book of Daniel, he is a symbolic creature, a hybrid of many different elements. As the Lamb it is perhaps his identity as the redemptive sacrifice that is most emphasised.

But that is not all that he is. He is also a kingly creature who will avenge his saints, a conqueror who will overcome those who oppose him. A question to consider.

In the previous chapter the Lamb ascended into the presence of the throne but in this chapter we see that the saints are still at the base of the altar. They seem to need to follow the Lamb in his movement up into God's presence. How might reflecting upon this help us to think better about the relationship between Christ and his body, his church?