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Adonai and Adoni (Psalm 110:1)

The Bible's supreme proof text for telling the difference between the One God and the Messiah who is *not* God

This verse was referred to the Messiah by the Pharisees and by Jesus. It tells us that the relationship between God and Jesus is that of Deity and non-Deity. The Messiah is called *adoni* (my lord) and in every one of its 195 occurrences *adoni* (my lord) means a superior *who is not God*. *Adonai* on the other hand refers exclusively to the One God in all of its 449 occurrences. *Adonai* is the title of Deity and *adoni* never designates Deity.

If the Messiah were called *Adonai* this would introduce “two Gods” into the Bible and would be polytheism. Psalm 110:1 should guard us all against supposing that there are *two* who are God. In fact the Messiah is the supreme human being and agent of the One God. Psalm 110:1 is the Bible's master text for defining the Son of God in relation to the One God, his Father.

Why is it that a number of commentaries misstate the facts about Psalm 110:1? They assert that the word for the Messiah in Psalm 110:1 is *adonai*. It is not. These commentaries seem to obscure a classic text defining God in relation to His Son. The Hebrew text assigns to the Messiah the title *adoni* which invariably distinguishes the one addressed from the Deity. The Messiah is the supreme human lord. He is not the Lord God (cp. I Tim. 2:5; I Cor. 8:4-6; Mark 12:28ff).

Why is the Messiah called *adoni* (my lord) and never *adonai* (my Lord God)?

“*Adonai* and *Adoni* are variations of Masoretic pointing to distinguish divine reference from human.”

Adonai is referred to God but *Adoni* to human superiors.

***Adoni* — ref. to men: my lord, my master [see Ps. 110:1]**

Adonai — ref. to God...Lord (Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, under *adon* [= lord]).

“The form *ADONI* (‘my lord’), a royal title (I Sam. 29:8), is to be **carefully distinguished** from the divine title *ADONAI* (‘my Lord’) used of Yahweh.” “*ADONAI* — the special plural form [the divine title] distinguishes it from *adonai* [with short vowel] = my lords” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Lord,” p. 157).

“Lord in the OT is used to translate *ADONAI* when applied to the Divine Being. The [Hebrew] word...has a suffix [with special pointing] presumably for the sake of distinction...between divine and human appellative” (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, “Lord,” Vol. 3, p. 137).

“Hebrew *Adonai* exclusively denotes the God of Israel. It is attested about 450 times in the OT...*Adoni* [is] addressed to human beings (Gen. 44:7, Num. 32:25, II Kings 2:19 [etc.]). We have to assume that the word *adonai* received its special form to distinguish it from the secular

use of adon [i.e., adoni]. The reason why [God is addressed] as *adonai*, [with long vowel] instead of the normal adon, *adoni* or *adonai* [with short vowel] may have been to distinguish Yahweh from other gods and from human lords” (*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, p. 531).

“The lengthening of the ā on Adonai [the Lord God] may be traced to the concern of the Masoretes to mark the word as sacred by a small external sign” (*Theological Dictionary of the OT*, “Adon,” p. 63 and *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, III, 1060ff. n.109).

“The form ‘to my lord,’ l’*adoni*, is never used in the OT as a divine reference...the generally accepted fact that the masoretic pointing distinguishes divine references (*adonai*) from human references (*adoni*)” (Wigram, *The Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the OT*, p. 22) (Herbert Bateman, “Psalm 110:1 and the NT,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct.-Dec., 1992, p. 438).