

SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND

(Psalm 110:1)

by Allon Maxwell

*"The LORD said unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand until
I make thine enemies thy footstool."*

This Old Testament verse, from Psalm 110:1, is quoted in the New Testament no less than 22 times! [\(1\)](#) The Messianic significance attached to it by the New Testament writers demands our attention. It is unfortunate that the translators of the KJV clouded the meaning of David's words by assigning an upper case "L" to that second "lord" in the verse. This "lapse" has unfortunate complications for those who are unable to read the Hebrew text themselves. It fails to follow the normally expected "translators' convention" which uses an upper case "L" to distinguish between two quite different Hebrew words, one of which always refers to God, and the other of which never refers to God. The error has been perpetuated by some later versions (NKJV, NASB, NIV), but has been recognised and corrected, by several others (RSV, NRSV, NEB). That upper case "L" has led many to misuse the verse as a Trinitarian "proof text." However, as we shall see, that is not the intention of the verse at all.

MORE ABOUT THAT "TRANSLATORS' ERROR"

In our English Bibles, the same word "lord" translates several distinct Hebrew words. A long established "translators' convention" uses different combinations of upper and lower case letters ("LORD," "Lord," and "lord") to differentiate between the original Hebrew words.

When we see "Lord" written with an upper case "L," those of us who don't read Hebrew rely on the established convention that it is, most often, a translation of "Adonai." [\(2\)](#)

The problem is that in this verse the original Hebrew word is not "adonai"! In this one verse, the KJV has clouded the issue by assigning an upper case "L" to the quite different word "ADONI." In all other places where this word is translated as "lord" in the KJV, it appears with a lower case "l."

THE HEBREW LESSON

We need first to look at the use of all the Hebrew words which are translated "lord." The information for the following short "Hebrew lesson" has been gleaned from Young's Concordance and recent E-mail correspondence with my good friend Anthony Buzzard. [\(3\)](#)

YHWH, ADON, ADONI, AND ADONAI

Young lists eleven Hebrew words which are translated "lord." The four which concern us here are those listed in the heading immediately above.

1. YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah)

This word is the first "LORD" in Psalm 110:1. It is the Divine Name considered so sacred by the Jews that it is never pronounced. Instead when reading from the Scriptures they substitute the word "Adonai" (see below).

The accepted convention is that in English translations it always appears as either LORD, or GOD (all upper case) thus enabling us to recognise that the original word is "Yahweh."

2. ADON

This word is formed from the Hebrew consonants Aleph, Dalet, Nun. It appears often in this

form (without any suffix). Apart from about 30 occasions where it refers to the Divine Lord, all of the other occurrences refer to human lords.

In English, it always has a lower case "l," except on those comparatively few occasions where it refers to God. In those cases it is given an upper case "L."

It is important to distinguish between "Adon" and three other similar, but quite distinct, words which are formed from it by the addition of suffixes.

3. ADONAI

"Adonai" accounts for two of the three other words just mentioned above. It is formed from the root word "adon" with the addition of the suffix "AI."

In its main form, it always refers to God, **and no one else.**

The accepted "translators' convention" is that in this form, it always appears in English as "Lord" (with an upper case "L").

The main form of "Adonai" has a different vowel point under the "N" to distinguish it from the second much less common form of the word. (The second form of "Adonai" is used in the plural, of men, very occasionally.)

4. ADONI

This is formed by adding the suffix "i" to "adon." With this suffix it means "**my lord.**" (It is also sometimes translated as "master.")

It appears 195 times, and is used almost entirely of human lords (but occasionally of angels). When translated "lord," it always appears with a lower case "l" (except for that one time in Psalm 110:1).

THE VOWEL POINTS IN PSALM 110:1

The Hebrew text identifies vowels by a system of "vowel points" (which, to the untrained eye, look like random "dots" and "squiggles") placed above, below, or alongside the appropriate consonant. This vowel pointing system was developed by the Massoretes. [\(4\)](#)

Now for some more information provided by Anthony Buzzard. [\(3\)](#)

As mentioned above, the two words "ADONAI" and "ADONI" are both formed from the root word "ADON."

They share the same consonants - ADNY
i.e. In Hebrew ALEPH, DALET, NUN, YOD.

The difference is in the vowel pointing:

- "ADONAI" is formed by placing the point "quamets" under NUN.

- "ADONI" is formed by placing the point "hireq" under NUN.

(Just one tiny letter different, but an enormous difference in meaning!)

CONFIRMATION FROM THE SEPTUAGINT

There are some who persist in reading the word ADONAI in this verse, instead of ADONI. This is usually justified by claiming that the Massoretes have assigned the wrong vowel points.

However the "Greek factor" from the Septuagint version (LXX) supports the Massorettes.

The following information was passed on to me recently by Bill Wachtel. [\(5\)](#)

The Hebrew text in Ps. 110:1 is actually LADONI ("L" + "adoni").

ADONI = my lord.

LADONI = TO my lord.

In the Greek of the LXX, LADONI becomes:

"to kurio mou" (= to my lord)

If the text had read:

LADONAI (= to the Divine Lord) the Greek would have read simply "to kurio."

Thus the LXX confirms for us that the original Hebrew is ADONI, and that the Massorettes got it right.

THE MESSIANIC CONNECTION

Many have incorrectly assumed that the original Hebrew word in Psalm 110:1 is ADONAI (which always refers to God). This has led to the further incorrect assumption that the verse is a "proof text" for the doctrine of the Trinity.

However, we have seen that the actual Hebrew word used is ADONI. This word refers to human lords. It speaks of the HUMANITY of Jesus -- not Deity.

Psalm 110:1 should be studied in the context of the many New Testament quotations which use it.

Viewed properly, it is clearly Messianic -- NOT Trinitarian.

In the 22 places where it is quoted in the NT, the overwhelming conclusion is that the early Church relied very heavily on Psalm 110:1 to prove that the MAN Jesus, who now sits at the right hand of God, is indeed both Messiah and Son of God.

As David's descendant, Jesus would normally be considered by Jewish tradition to be INFERIOR in rank to David.

But through His miraculous Divine paternity, the impossible has happened!

Although Jesus is both totally Human, and descended from David, He nevertheless OUTRANKS him by right of birth.

As "Son of David," Jesus has inherited David's throne (*Luke 1:32-33*). But as "Son of God," Jesus has also been "highly exalted to receive the name which is above every name" (*Philippians 2:9-11*).

**In accordance with the Scriptures,
Jesus is forever both man and Messiah.**

His throne is for ever.

**His name is above David's name for ever.
He is David's King for ever!**

THAT is why David calls Him "lord"!

Footnotes

1. Psalm 110:1 is quoted by:

Jesus: Matt. 22:44; Matt. 26:64; Mark 12:36; Mark 14:62; Mark 16:19; Luke 20:42, 43; Luke 22:69; Rev 3:21.

Peter: Acts 2:33-34, Acts 5:31. I Pet. 3:22.

Stephen: Acts 7:55-56.

Paul: Rom 8:34; I Cor. 15:25; Eph 1:20; Eph 2:6 Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; Heb 1:13 Heb 8:1; Heb. 10:12-13; Heb. 12:2.

2. On about 30 occasions the word "adon" is also translated with an upper case "L." However it should be noted that "adon" much more often refers to a human lord, and then it is translated with a lower case "l."

3. Sir Anthony F. Buzzard , Bt., M.A., (Oxon.), M.A. Th., A.R.C.M., teaches at the Atlanta Bible College of the Church of God General Conference.

4. THE MASSORETIC VOWEL POINTS

The following information on the Massorettes and their work has been condensed from various books, encyclopedias and Internet sources.

The ancient Hebrew texts were comprised of consonants only. There were no vowels or punctuation marks. The Massorettes were Hebrew scholars who, over several centuries, established a system of vowel markings to indicate the traditional pronunciation and intonation. We call these the "vowel points."

This work was not completed until several centuries after the beginning of the Christian era.

One sometimes encounters people whose determination to retain Psalm 110:1 as a Trinitarian "proof text" leads them to (selectively) discount the reliability of the Massoretic vowel pointing system, in favour of some other personal preference, especially when it suits their particular theological bias. However unless there is compelling documented evidence for changes of this kind, they are seldom helpful. We must be very cautious about introducing arbitrary changes of this kind, lest we leave ourselves open to accusations of "intellectual dishonesty."

The following summary will provide a brief introduction to the Massorettes:

- The work of the Massorettes was done principally in the period AD 500-900.

- Although there were different schools of Massorettes, their differences seem to have left us very few variations in the meaning of the Hebrew consonantal text.

- It was the goal of the Massorettes to preserve the traditional meaning of the Hebrew text. (This was perceived as necessary, because ancient Hebrew is a strictly consonantal language, and therefore prone to error in transmission.)

- One of the ways they did this was to develop a system of vowel pointing, which indicates the traditional pronunciation and meaning of the text.

- Since Hebrew is a consonantal language, there are many places where the same consonants are used for quite different words.

(Note:- That is no different from English! Often the same consonants form different words when associated with different vowels. Often the same combination of consonants and vowels has a different pronunciation, and a different meaning. When that happens, we use context and tradition to interpret the intended meaning.)

- The Massoretic vowel pointing indicates the traditional meaning, understanding, and pronunciation which

had formerly been passed down from generation to generation, by oral tradition, through their teachers.

- In cases where identical groups of consonants were traditionally understood to be different words, with different meanings attached, the pointing system made that clear and preserved it for future generations.

- Our current English translations all rely heavily on the pointed text.

As a LAYMAN, I conclude that what we have now is the work of dedicated Jewish Scholars, which reflects the best consensus about what was ALREADY accepted as the traditional understanding of the text, over many centuries.

Consequently when the Massorettes reported "adoni" instead of "adonai," in Psalm 110:1, they were following the oral tradition. As we have already seen above, the LXX, which predates the pointed text by centuries, supports this conclusion.

The Massorettes knew that in the unpointed text for that verse, the word "ADNY" was properly read and understood as a human lord, "ADONI," and not the divine Lord, "ADONAI."

And in the providence of God, they inserted vowel points which preserved it that way for us (and our English translators).

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