Anderson, David R.

The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews

Studies in Biblical Literature 21


Moschos Goutzioudis
Thessaloniki, 54632

David Anderson has explored the use of Ps 110:1, 4 in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In chapter 1 “Introduction,” Anderson begins his study by raising the point that is the problem of the kingdom of God concerning the present ministry of Christ. It is true that according to modern interpreters, Ps 110 is so important because it touches on two of the three offices of Christ, those of king and priest, both of which Hebrews applies to Christ. The purpose of this study is to determine if the use of Ps 110:1, 4 helps delineate the present ministry of Christ as it is revealed in Hebrews. Anderson suggests that Ps 110:1 must be studied independently from 110:4.

In chapter 2 “Sacral Kingship,” Anderson suggests that it seems more likely that Ps 110 had been used by someone writing in 1000 B.C., so he explores the institution of sacral kingship in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Ugarit and their influence on Israel. He believes that if the king-priest cannot be established in the religion of Israel, it can be safely concluded that the practice of sacral kingship was practiced in Canaan before the monarchical period, since Melchizedek was a royal priest. Another question that arises in this chapter is if the kings of Israel were also priests. Anderson’s view is a negative one. His argumentation is based on Heb 7:12–14, and thus no king of the monarchical period fits the glass slipper of Ps 110:1, 4.

Chapter 3 “Psalm 110,” deals with Ps 110 in the Old Testament. On the dating of the psalm the author of the book prefers to follow the broad consensus of scholarship that dates it during the period of the early monarchy. As for the writer, he argues that David
wrote the psalm and that the addressee was the Messiah, understood as a human king in the Davidic line. The Sitz im Leben of the psalm is undetermined. It is very interesting that after exploring the main problems of Ps 110 Anderson then presents the modern way of its interpretation, distinguishing its interpreters into two basic camps. The first camp is presented under the title “nonprophetic camp,” which is divided into two subgroups (the cultic and the purely historical group). The second is the “prophetic camp,” which is divided into two subgroups too (the directly messianic and the typological-prophetic group). Anderson prefers the directly messianic interpretation of the psalm because he believes that the addressee of Ps 110:1 and 4 must have been the Messiah himself.

Chapter 4, “Psalm 110 in the New Testament,” is a survey of the uses of the psalm in the New Testament outside Hebrews (Synoptics, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter). The most important conclusions here are: (1) the most common theme among New Testament writings is the messianic understanding attributed to the psalm and the connection with Jesus and his kingdom; and (2) another important theme is the already–not yet dialectic. Anderson shows that the Ps 110:1 tradition was established early in the first-century church as it showcased the Messiah.

The main question, then, that dominates chapter 5, “Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews: Its Royal Contribution,” is: What are the royal implications of Ps 110:1 in the Epistle to the Hebrews? Anderson’s analysis of Heb 1:3d and 1:13, where Ps 110:1 is the only Old Testament passage quoted twice in Heb 1, shows the supreme importance of the psalm for the thought of the writer of the epistle. He believes that Jesus’ reign and kingdom have already begun because his enemies have already been placed under his footstool. The Son of God has fulfilled all the messianic expectations. Anderson is right to say that the eschatology of Hebrews is not just horizontal but vertical as well (earthly/heavenly).

In chapter 6, “Psalm 110 in Hebrews: Its Priestly Contribution,” the significance of Ps 110:4 is explored, as this verse gives to Christ authority to his appointment as a priest. There is also an excursus on Melchizedek, where texts from Philo, Qumran, Josephus, patristic, and rabbinical literature that mention him are presented. There are no references to Philo’s fragment on Gen 14:20 in the Quaestiones or to 4Q401 and 4Q5Amram of Qumran. Gnostic speculations about Melchizedek are missing as well. Anderson believes that Hebrews treats Melchizedek as a historical person (Canaanite king-priest). His view here is that Ps 110:1 makes a significant contribution to the priesthood of Christ, as does Ps 110:4 (238). Thus he calls Ps 110 the sine qua non of the priesthood of Christ, at least within the Epistle to the Hebrews. He suggests that the many citations of Ps 110:4 in Heb 6:20–7:28 underscore the superiority of the priesthood of the Son because, like Melchizedek, he has a priesthood in perpetuity. Anderson’s main view is that Ps 110 is the primary priestly contribution to Hebrews.
Chapter 7, “Conclusion,” is the general conclusion of the study. It is structured by a differentiation on the conclusions. There are two broad categories of conclusions: the analytic conclusions from each chapter, and the synthetic ones, resulting from combining the conclusions from the previous category. I found a third category of conclusions (unwarranted) of the book important for the study of Hebrews. Finally, the main question of the study about the present ministry of Christ is answered as follows: Jesus is the Davidic king who fulfilled messianic functions. If Christ is ruling over an inaugurated form of the Davidic kingdom, then it could also be inferred that he is ruling from the Davidic throne. Something more interesting exists in the last two pages of the general bibliography, where unpublished works are included.