



PSALM 110

"Sit at my right side"

Translation and Performance Notes

LEGEND FOR COLORED WORDS:

Key term

Exegesis of emotions

Imagery

Other translation challenges

Hebrew text	verse	English Close-but-Clear Translation
לְדוֹד מִזְמוֹר נָאֻם יְהוָה לְאֹדְנִי יָשֵׁב לְיָמִינִי עַד-אֲשִׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ תַּחַם לְרַגְלֶיךָ:	1	A psalm by David. YHWH's oracle to my lord: "Sit at my right side, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
מִטֵּה-עֹז יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רֹדֶה בְּקִרְבֵּי אֹיְבָיו:	2	YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
עַמְּךָ נִדְבָתָהּ בַּיּוֹם תִּלְבֵּה בְּהַדְרִי-קֹדֶשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁחָר לְךָ טֶל יִלְדֻתֶיהָ:	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אֶתֶּה-כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דִּבְרֹתֵי מֶלְכִי-צִדֵּק:	4	YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek."
אֲדֹנִי עַל-יְמִינֶךָ מִחֵץ יוֹם-אָפוּ מְלָכִים:	5	The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.
יָדִינוּ בְּגוֹיִם מָלֵא גּוֹיֹת מִחֵץ רֹאשׁ עַל-אֶרֶץ רְבָה:	6	He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. He smashed heads across the wide world.
מִנְחַל בְּדָרוֹ יִשְׁתֶּה עַל-כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ:	7	He will drink from a wadi on the campaign. Therefore, he will lift his head.

GENERAL TRANSLATION TIPS FOR THIS PSALM:

- To translate poetry accurately and beautifully, a knowledge of both the source language's poetry and the target language's poetry is needed. So, here are the steps we recommend to follow when setting out to translate this or any psalm:
 1. **GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S POETRY/ARTS.** Research and analyze many examples from numerous genres of poetry, storytelling, and music in the target language and culture, and document findings. See our [Local Arts Analysis Guide](#) for help.
 2. **GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S (HEBREW) MEANING AND POETRY.** The aim of all our materials is to provide exactly this for the translator, poet/musician/artist, and consultant: an understanding of what the psalm *means*, as well as its *poetics*.
 3. **TRANSLATE THE PSALM IN THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL ART/POETRY GENRE(S).**
 4. **TEST THE TRANSLATION WITH THE LANGUAGE COMMUNITY, SEEKING FEEDBACK ABOUT BOTH WORD CHOICES AND FORM/GENRE/MEDIA OF TRANSLATION.**

TRANSLATION TIPS: PSALM AS A WHOLE

These are the elements that we believe are most helpful to keep in mind during both drafting and checking translations, to help verify that the translation or performance is accurate beyond just a word- or verse-level; just as important is accuracy on the level of a **whole**. Additionally, these are elements that will guide decisions about **performance** in oral translations, songs, poems, or other kinds of art based on this psalm.

1. Overview

The picture below gives a gives a basic **Overview** of the Psalm, answering the following questions:

- **Title-what title best describes this unique psalm?**
 - "Sit at my right side"
- **Purpose-why was this psalm written?**
 - To assure the king of his certain success.
- **Content-In summary, what is said in this psalm?**
 - YHWH will subdue your enemies and extend your dominion!
- **Message-what is the general theme of this psalm? What seems to be the main point the psalmist wanted his audience to realize by hearing this psalm?**
 - YHWH will give universal dominion to his king (cf. Ps. 2).

2. Story Behind the Psalm

Every psalm has a coherent story behind it. However, many psalms are not written in typical "story" format, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Here, we attempt to understand the story and background that prompted the psalmist to write.

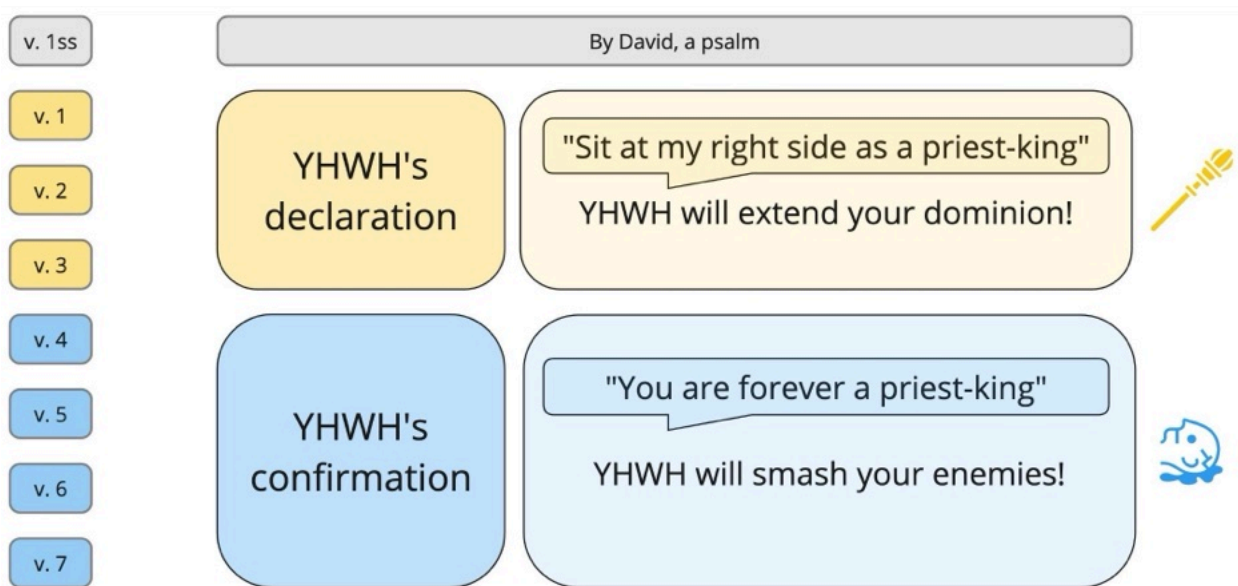
- **Story Behind**-How do the various parts of the psalm fit together into a single, coherent story? What is the main message/theme conveyed by this "story behind"?
 - YHWH had promised to give David's dynasty universal dominion—in other words, YHWH had promised David that someone from David's family line would rule over everything and everyone (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16). The psalm implies that David then had a vision about a coming ruler, or "lord", from David's family line. In this vision, this human lord is actually David's lord too, and this lord sits at YHWH's right side, YHWH subdues the lord's enemies, and YHWH and the lord rule over the world. David's expectation is that sometime after he speaks this psalm YHWH will raise up this human lord and make him reign forever over the whole world. The main theme of this "story behind" is that YHWH keeps his promise to David.
- **Background situation**-what are the series of events leading up to the time in which the psalm was written?



3. Layout

Knowing the layout of the psalm by sections helps us to understand the progression of thought as the poem progresses.

The picture below shows the main “chunks” or pieces of the poem. Verse numbers appear on the left. The second column has a title for each section. The large third column contains a brief summary of the section’s content. As you read through the content column, you will see important words and ideas highlighted in similar colors. The icons on the right may be used as memory aids.

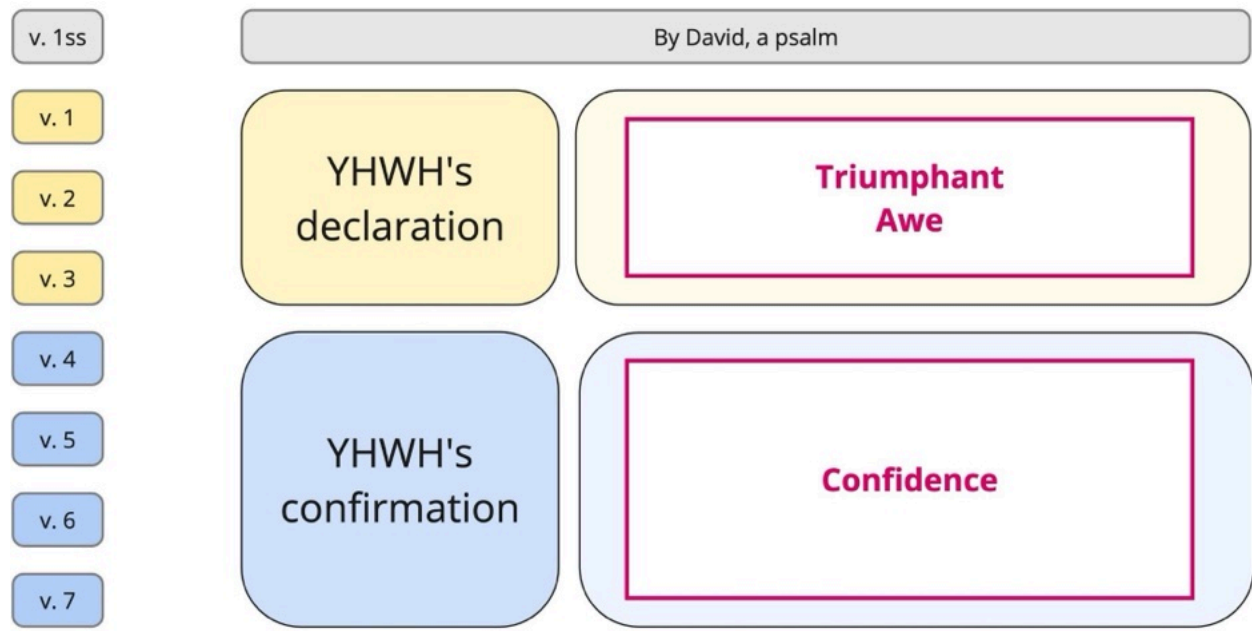


Progression—what is the flow of thought as the poem progresses?

- This psalm consists of two sections that report and examine two messages from YHWH: an oracle that declares and an oath that confirms:
 - In the first section, YHWH declares an oracle. He commands the psalmist's human lord to sit in a special position of authority while YHWH conquers the lord's enemies and extends the king's rule. In part, this will happen because the people of YHWH assemble for battle.
 - In the second section, YHWH confirms a promise. Specifically, YHWH promises that the human lord will be a priest forever. Then the psalmist describes how YHWH will smash the lord's enemies, like the oracle foretold in the first section, and YHWH give him victory.

4. Emotions

Part of poetry is communicating emotion. Each section, and even each verse, can contain a number of different emotions. Here are the main emotional themes of each section:



5. Participants and Speech Acts

In poetry, it is important to keep track of who is speaking, who is the audience, and what it is that the speaker is trying to do with his words.

In the chart below, the left-hand column identifies the speaker, who is the psalmist. In verses 2 and 4, the psalmist reports the speech of YHWH. The right-hand column identifies the audience, who is David's lord. The middle column tells what the speaker is trying to do with his words (his speech acts) in each section.

SPEAKER		ADDRESSEE
David	REPORT OF YHWH'S ORACLE (v. 1)	David's lord
YHWH	YHWH's oracle: "Sit at my right side"	
	ASSURANCE OF SUCCESS (vv. 2-3)	
	Your dominion will be extended (v. 2) Your people will be willing (v. 3)	
	REPORT OF YHWH'S OATH (v. 4)	
YHWH	YHWH's oath: "You are a priest"	
	REPORT OF PROPHETIC VISION (vv. 5-7)	
	YHWH will defeat all of your enemies (vv. 5-7)	

6. Poetics

In this section, we ask, "what kinds of artistic beauty did the psalmist incorporate into the poem to reinforce its message?" (See Poetic Features video and layer for more details.)

Feature 1: Claimed and Confirmed

לְדוֹד מְזִמּוֹר	1	A psalm by David.
נֹאם יְהוָה לְאֹדְנִי יָשֵׁב לִימִינִי עַד־אֲשִׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ הַדָּם לְרִגְלֶיךָ: מִטֶּה־עֶזְךָ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רֹדֶה בְּקֶרֶב אֹיְבֶיךָ: עַמֶּךָ נִדְבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ בְּהַדְרֵי־אֲדָשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁחָר לְךָ טֶלֶל יְלֻדְתֶּיךָ:	2	YHWH's oracle to my lord: "Sit at my right side, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אֶת־הַכֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל־דְּבָרָתִי מִלְכִּי־צִדֵּק: אֲדַגִּי עַל־יְמִינֶךָ מִחֵץ בְּיוֹם־אֲפֹו מְלָכִים: נָדְיוֹ בְּגוֹיִם מְלֵא גֵוִיֹת מִחֵץ רֹאשׁ עַל־אֲרָץ רָבָה: מִנְחֹל בְּעֶרְףְּ יִשְׁתָּה עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ:	4	YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek." The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed. He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. He smashed heads across the wide world. He will drink from a wadi on the campaign. Therefore, he will lift his head.
	5	
	6	
	7	

The psalm is structured in two parallel halves (verses 1-3 and verses 4-7). The repetition in these two halves serves "to assure the king of his certain success."

Both halves begin (in verses 1 and 4) according to a similar pattern: a speech-related Hebrew word that begins with the letter nun (נ) + divine name + YHWH's quoted speech. In the middle of both halves (verse 2 and verses 5-6), the psalmist describes the king's "rule" (using different words) over enemies. Both halves conclude (in verses 3 and 7) by mentioning a nourishing water source: "dew" (verse 3) and "wadi" (verse 7).

The second half of the psalm not only corresponds to the first half, it also amplifies the meaning of the first half. In the first half, YHWH invites the king to sit at his right hand (verse 1), and in the second half, YHWH confirms the king's special status with an unchanging oath (verse 4). In the first half, the psalmist assures the king that YHWH will extend his dominion so that he rules among his enemies (verse 2), and in the second half (verses 5-6), the psalmist describes these same events in much more vivid language. In the first half, the psalmist assures the king that his army gathered *before the battle* will be like dew (verse 3). In the second half he says that after the battle, YHWH will drink from the enemy's wadi (verse 7), thus speaking from the perspective of a *finished victory*.

Feature 2: The Lord and the lord

לְדוֹד מְזִמּוֹר	1	A psalm by David.
נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה לְאַדְנִי יָשֵׁב לְיְמִינִי עַד־אֲשִׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ תַּחַם לְרִגְלֶיךָ: מִטֵּה־עֲזָךְ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רֹדֶף בְּקֶרֶב אֹיְבֶיךָ: עֲמֹךְ נִדְבַח בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ בְּהַדְרֵי־אֵדָשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁחָר לֶךְ טַל יִלְדְּתִיךָ:		YHWH's oracle to my lord : "Sit at my right side , until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
	2	YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אַתָּה־כֹּהֵן לְעֹלָם עַל־דְּבָרֹתַי מִלְכִּי־צֶדֶק: אֲדָנִי עַל־יְמִינֶךָ מִנְחָן בְּיוֹם־אֲפֹ מִלְּקִים: ? תִּרְוֶה בְּגוֹיִם מְלֵא גִּוְיוֹת מִנְחָן רֹאשׁ עַל־אֶרֶץ רַבָּה: מִנְחָל בְּדֶגֶר וְשִׁמְחָה ? עַל־כֵּן יִרְמֶה רֹאשׁ:		4 YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek."
	5	The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.
	6	He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. ? He smashed heads across the wide world.
	7	He will drink from a wadi on the campaign. ? Therefore, he will lift his head.

In verse 1, the king is referred to as "**my lord**" (אדני), and he is invited to sit at YHWH's "**right side**" (ימין). In verse 5, YHWH is referred to as "**the Lord**" (אדני) and is said to be at the king's "**right side**" (ימין).

And not only are these two participants—the **lord** and the **Lord**—described in similar terms, but in verses 5-7 (especially verse 7), it is difficult to determine which of them is the subject. This ambiguity may be on purpose. It is possible that the psalmist meant to communicate that "God and the king are mutually exchangeable,"¹ or that their identities are so close that they have "a oneness of will and purpose"² in the psalm. See [The Subject\(s\) in Ps. 110:5-7](#).

¹ van der Lugt 2013, 231.

² Mitchell 2003, 263. A similar ambiguity of subject and conflation of YHWH and the king takes place in Ps. 2:12.

Feature 3: Pentateuchal (Torah) Prophecy

Genesis 14	
Numbers 24:15-19	
לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר	1 A psalm by David.
נֹאם יְהוָה לִּי אֲדֹנָי יְשׁוּבָה לְיָמֵי עַד־אֲשִׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ תַּחֲתֵי רַגְלֶיךָ:	YHWH's oracle to my lord: "Sit at my right side, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
מִשֵּׁה־עֲזָרָךְ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רֹדֶה בְּקֶרֶב אֹיְבֶיךָ:	2 YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
עַמְּךָ נִדְבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁתַּר לֶךְ מִלְּגִתֶּיךָ:	3 Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power . On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחַם אַתָּה־כִּכֶּן לְעוֹלָם עַל־דְּבָרֶיךָ מִלְּכִי־צֶדֶק:	4 YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek ."
אֲדֹנָי עַל־יְמִינֶךָ	5 The Lord at your right side
מִחֲצִי כְּיוֹם־אָפוּ מַלְכִּים:	smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.
נָדָו בְּגוֹיִם מָלֵא גִּוְיוֹת מִחֲצִי רֹאשׁ עַל־אֶרֶץ רַבָּה:	6 He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. He smashed heads across the wide world.
בְּנַחֲלֵי בְּנֵי־יִשְׁתָּה עַל־פֶּן גִּרִּים רֹאשׁ:	7 He will drink from a wadi on the campaign. Therefore, he will lift his head.

Psalm 110 strongly alludes to two passages in the Torah: **Genesis 14** and **Numbers 24:15-19**.

Genesis 14 is the only other passage in the Hebrew Bible to mention "**Melchizedek**."³ The same chapter also describes a great battle in which **kings** are defeated **across the wide world** (Ps. 110:5-6) and which concludes in the victors **drinking** (Gen. 14:18; Ps. 110:4).

Numbers 24:15-19, which is the content of the prophet Balaam's oracle, also shares several features in common with Psalm 110:

- an "**oracle**" (נֹאם)
- the oracle describes a "**staff**" (שֵׁבֶט) that will come "from Israel" (מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל) (compare "**from Zion**," Ps. 110:2a)
- the staff will "**smash**" (מָחָץ) the **heads** of his enemies (Ps. 110:5-6) and "**rule**" (רָדָה) (Ps. 110:2b).
- The word "**power**" (חֵיל) is also used in Numbers 24 (Ps. 110:3).

Psalm 110 is an oracle (that is, a divine revelation) that develops *previous* divine revelation. Like the Messianic figure in Balaam's oracle, the king in Ps. 110 will conquer his enemies and "rule" (רָדָה). Psalm 110 develops the Messianic picture of Numbers 24 by blending it with Genesis 14: the Messiah will be, like Melchizedek, both king and priest in Zion. Just as the coalition of evil kings was defeated across the wide world in the days of Melchizedek, so too when the new "Melchizedek" comes, YHWH (with the king at his side) will conquer the rebellious kings of the earth.

³ Gen. 14:18; cf. Ps. 110:4.

7. Prominence

What words, phrases, or ideas are most important in this psalm?: It is important to consider how the author chose to draw attention to certain parts of the psalm. Here are the parts of the psalm that we believe are most prominent, and thus should be most prominent in a performance of the psalm.

לְדָוִד מְזֻמָּר	1	A psalm by David.
נָאֻם יְהוָה לְאַדְנִי יָשֵׁב לִימִינִי עַד-אֲשֶׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ תַּחַם לְרֵגְלֶיךָ:		YHWH's oracle to my lord: "Sit at my right side, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
מִשְׁה-עֲזָרָה יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן לְדָוִד בְּקֶרֶב אֹיְבָיו:	2	YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
עַמְּךָ נִדְבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ בְּהַדְרֵי-קֹדֶשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁנֵר לְךָ טַל יִלְדְּתִיךָ:	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אַתָּה-כֹּהֵן לְעֹלָם עַל-דִּבְרֹתַי מִלְכִּי-צֶדֶק:	4	YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek."
אֲדַגִּי עַל-יְמִינֶךָ מִחֵץ בְּיוֹם-אַפּוֹ מִלְּקִים:	5	The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.
יָדִין בְּגוֹיִם מְלֵא גִוְיוֹת מִחֵץ רֹאשׁ עַל-אֶרֶץ רָחֵב:	6	He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. He smashed heads across the wide world.
מִנְחַל בְּהָרֵךְ יִשְׁתָּה עַל-פָּנָיו יָרִים רֹאשׁ:	7	He will drink from a wadi on the campaign. Therefore, he will lift [his] head.

The most prominent parts of this psalm are the two direct quotations of YHWH's speech in verses 1 and 4:

- Each of these quotations serves as the beginning of a section of the psalm.
- Each quotation contains an introductory formula:
 - YHWH's oracle (נָאֻם יְהוָה, verse 1)
 - YHWH has sworn (נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה, verse 4).⁴
- Both quotations feature a special message from YHWH to the psalmist's human lord.

Additionally, verse 4bc (in bold in the diagram above) is the most prominent part of the psalm.

- It joins together the notions of a priest (verse 4b) and king (the first part of Melchizek's name means *king* in Hebrew). The joining of these two ideas was unusual in Israel (but not among Israel's neighbors), and would have been surprising to this psalm's original audience.
- Structurally, verse 4 is in parallel with verse 1 (see Poetic Feature 1). Often in Hebrew poetry, the second part of two parallel lines or sections intensifies the first part.
- Grammatically, verse 4bc is a single clause that runs over two lines, which is unusual in Hebrew.

⁴ van der Lugt 2013, 229.

TRANSLATION TIPS, VERSE BY VERSE

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 1–3: YHWH's Declaration

- The title for this section may be understood as **What YHWH Declares**. Here, YHWH declares an oracle, which is a message from a divine being, given by a prophet.
- This section may be divided into two parts:
 - The first part contains a quoted speech of YHWH (verse 1)
 - The second part contains an elaboration of that speech (verses 2-3)
 - The second part speaks of the king's rule over enemies (verse 2)
 - Then, the second part contains mention of water (*dew*; verse 3)

This pattern will repeat in verses 4-7.

- This section contains the 2ms suffix ("you" or "your") 8 times, with multiple occurrences in each verse. So, this first section is characterized by direct addresses to the human lord. The first section explains the human lord's work. The 2ms suffix only occurs once in the second section (verses 4-7). The second section focuses on the activity of YHWH in battle.

VERSE 1

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

A psalm by David to whom YHWH promised an everlasting dynasty, who is also a prophet.

This psalm is **YHWH's** prophetic **oracle** which he revealed to me in a vision. In this oracle, YHWH speaks **to my lord** who is my descendant and yet who is also my superior. He says to him, "**Sit** with me on my throne **at my right side** the place of supreme honour and so share in my rule over the world **until I** give you victory over your enemies and **make your enemies a footstool for your feet** such that your enemies are brought under your authority and control. You need not take matters into your own hands; I will subdue your enemies for you."

לְדוֹד מְזֻמֹּר נָאֵם יְהוָה לְאֶדְנִי שֵׁב לְיְמִינִי עַד־אֲשִׁית אֲבִירָה הָדָם לְרַגְלֶיךָ:	1	A psalm by David. YHWH's oracle to my lord: "Sit at my right side, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
---	---	--

- The first line of this verse is a superscription. Superscriptions can identify the psalmist, the instruments, the tune, the setting, and other information. See our upcoming page and video on Superscriptions for more information.
- The superscription describes this poem as a **psalm** (מְזֻמֹּר). The Hebrew word "is a technical term for a song that was to be sung, perhaps with musical accompaniment."⁵ In order to distinguish a

⁵ Ross 2011, 40.

psalm from other kinds of songs, in some languages it may be necessary to add a qualifier such as *praise*, *religious*, or *worship*; for example *songs for worship* or *songs for praising God*. The translator must make sure to translate the key term **psalm** consistently with other psalms and with the way the word **psalm** is translated in the New Testament.

- The phrase **by David** (לְדָוִד) means that king David is the author of this psalm.
 - If the name **David** is unknown in the target language, it may be best to transliterate the name based upon the Hebrew letters or upon an existing translation from a language of wider communication.⁶
 - This phrase implies that David has written the psalm. Some languages may require that the verb be made clear: *A psalm written by David* or *A psalm composed by David*. Some languages may require an active construction: *David wrote this psalm* or *David composed this psalm*.
 - For more detail see the webpage [Ledavid](#).
- The phrase translated **YHWH's oracle** (נְאֻם יְהוָה) is a technical expression. It introduces a prophetic oracle, which is a direct quotation from YHWH that is delivered by a prophet.⁷ The rest of verse 1 after the phrase **to my lord**, and perhaps the whole psalm, is a direct quotation of YHWH's words.
 - Translators will need to be consistent in how they render the term YHWH throughout the Bible. Many translations render the divine name YHWH as LORD. Translators should be aware that in this verse, the rendering LORD can make it look like this word, which in Hebrew clearly refers to God, is the same as the following word for *lord*, which is not the divine name and can refer to God or to a human being (in this case, it refers to a human). In the Hebrew text, the words are so different that no one could confuse them. Here are some of the ways that translators have chosen to render the word YHWH:
 - transliteration, such as *Jehová* (RVR), *YHVH* (BTX), or *Yahweh* (Hausa CLB, LEB).
 - include both the word for *Lord* and the transliteration (BDS)
 - include both the word for *Lord* and the word for *God* (NFC: *Seigneur Dieu*)
 - render an attributive name that describes a characteristic of YHWH: *L'Eternel* (BDS, S21)
 - or, maintain the word LORD to render YHWH, and choose a different word for the second instance of *lord*, such as *king* (Hausa LMT: *sarki*; NFC: *roi*) or *master* (PDV: *maître*). See our upcoming page about translating the Divine Name.

⁶ If the phonetics of “David” (DAY-vid) as it is said in English (or dah-VEED as in Hebrew) do not work well in your language, consider adjusting some of the sounds/letters to sound more natural to your language. Some languages add a prefix or suffix to a name to designate a king or another rank or position of honor. How to translate/transliterate proper names is an important issue that is concerned with the tension between domestication and foreignization of a Bible translation: do we change the Hebrew or LWC names to sound more natural in our language, or do we preserve the Hebrew/LWC names in order to be closer to the source text? This should be decided before translation begins, in cooperation with the community and their desires and needs.

⁷ HALOT 657. So SDBH on נְאֻם: “action by which humans or deities make a prophetic statement; in the case of a deity this is usually done through the mouth of a prophet or seer.”

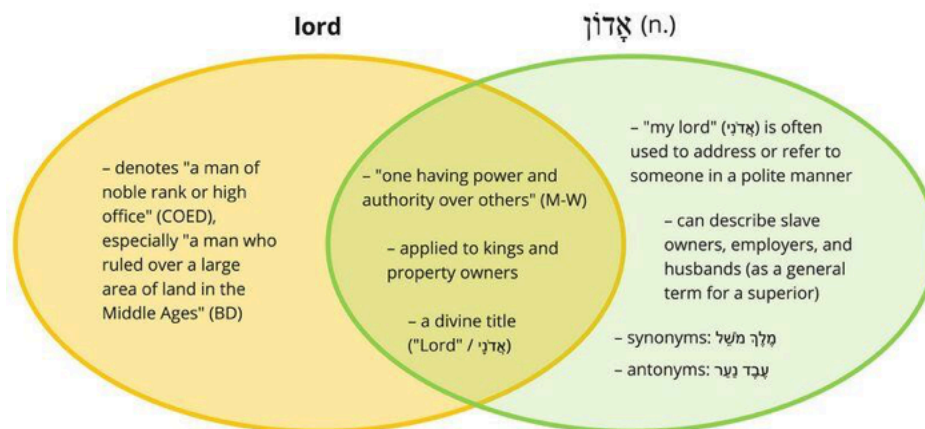
- Many translations render the noun phrase 'YHWH's oracle/proclamation' as a clause: "the Lord says/said to my Lord" (NIV, ESV, NLT, GNT). The NET more closely reflects the grammar of the Hebrew text: "Here is the LORD's proclamation to my lord."⁸
 - For languages that need to render the noun phrase as a verbal idea, we recommend something like: *Here is what Yahweh says/said to my lord*. In one sense, YHWH has already said it to the prophet (past tense), but in another sense, the message is being communicated to the hearer now for the first time (present tense). In Psalm 110, because the addressee of the oracle is identified as **my lord** and because the **lord** is hearing it here for the first time, we prefer to translate it with the present tense: *Here is what Yahweh says to my lord*.
- The oracle is addressed to **my lord**.
 - The pronoun **my** refers to the author of the psalm, who is King David (see the previous clause). For cultures where the referent may not be clear, translators may make it clear within the text (*my (David's) lord*) or add a footnote.
 - A **lord** is a "man who is in a position of authority over another person."⁹
 - The title **lord** is often applied to kings, and thus the use of this word is the first of several indications in the psalm that the addressee David is speaking to is a king.¹⁰
 - The third-person phrase **my lord** is often used when an inferior addresses a superior.¹¹ Here, the psalmist David is directly addressing his lord. It is as though David is standing before his lord and telling his lord the words of YHWH.
 - In some cultures, it may be inappropriate to address a superior using the third person. In such cases, the conventions of the culture for addressing a superior should be used. One possible strategy is to *you, my Lord*.
 - The following diagram compares the English word *lord* with the Hebrew term; the left-hand part of the yellow circle provides a meaning of the English term that does not apply to the Hebrew term; the right hand part of the green circle provides meanings of the Hebrew term that do not apply to the English word. The middle contains meanings that apply to both words:

⁸ See also several French and German translations: "Oracle du Seigneur à mon seigneur" (TOB; see NVS78); "Déclaration du Seigneur à mon seigneur" (NBS; see BDS, NFC); "Spruch des HERRN für meinen Herrn" (ELB; see ZÜR).

⁹ SDBH.

¹⁰ See the [Verse-by-Verse notes](#) for more detail.

¹¹ See, for example, Jacob's encounter with Esau in Gen. 33:8-14, in which Jacob, although speaking directly to Esau, refers to him in the third person as "my lord" to show deference. Also see 1 Sam. 26:19. Thus, the third person אדני ("my lord") in verse 1 does not imply that the king is not the addressee at this point in the psalm.

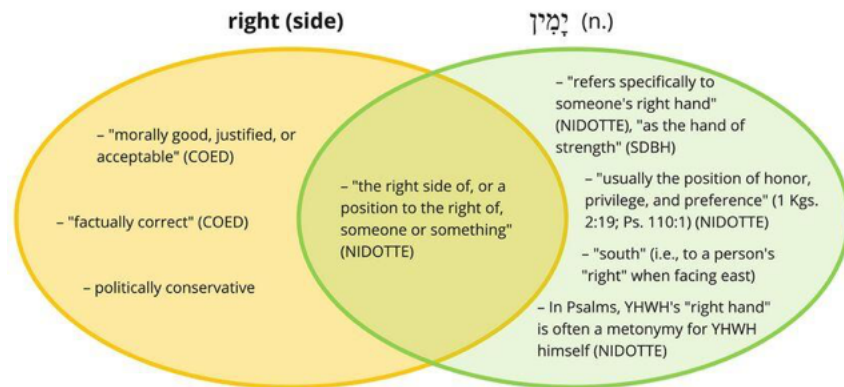


- This verse is one of the most-quoted verses in the New Testament. However, translators should be very careful not to bring later New Testament ideas backwards into the translation of this Old Testament text.
 - Since many translation teams begin with the New Testament, it will be important to check that the translation of this verse takes into account the places where the verse is quoted or alluded to in the NT (Matthew 22:44; 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; 5:31; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; and 1 Peter 3:22-24). Translation teams should prioritize faithfulness to the Hebrew before making any attempts to harmonize with the Greek quotations in the New Testament.
- YHWH invites the king to **sit at my right side** (יָשֵׁב לִימִינִי).
 - The Hebrew word for **right side** (יָמִין)¹² is also often translated here as *right hand*.¹³ In both cases, it is highly symbolic. Importantly, in Hebrew culture the right side/hand of a king was "the position of honor, privilege, and preference."¹⁴
 - Especially for cultures in which the "right side" does not clearly communicate privilege and honor, translators should make this meaning clear, as the NLT does: *Sit in the place of honor at my right hand*.
 - The following diagram illustrates the similarities and differences between the Hebrew and English terms for **right (side)**:

¹² So GNT, CEV; see NGÜ, GNB.

¹³ KJV, ESV, NIV, NLT, NET.

¹⁴ NIDOTTE. See 1 Kgs. 2:19; Ps. 45:10.



- Because YHWH himself sits on a heavenly throne (see, for example, Ps. 11:4), to *sit at YHWH's right* might mean either to sit on a throne next to YHWH's throne or to sit next to YHWH on his throne. In either case, the king is invited in verse 1 to occupy a place of high honor in YHWH's heavenly throne-room. Because only priests were allowed access into YHWH's throne-room,¹⁵ the king's position at YHWH's right anticipates the promise in verse 4 that the king is a priest forever.¹⁶
- The two lines of the quotation are joined by the word **until** (עַד).
 - This word might be taken to mean that the king will stop sitting at YHWH's right (verse 1a) once his enemies have been subdued (verse 1b). Sometimes, however, the word is used to "express a limit ... beyond which the action or state ... still continues."¹⁷ For example, Ps. 112:8 says, "His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, **until** he looks in triumph on his adversaries" (ESV). Here, the person's heart will likely also remain steady even after he looks in triumph. So, in Ps 110:1, it is possible that the king continues to sit at YHWH's right hand even *after* all of the enemies are subdued; the emphasis is on the fact that the king sits *at least until* the enemies are subdued.
- YHWH promises that he will **make your enemies a footstool for your feet**.
 - An **enemy** (אֹיֵב) is not quite the same as *one who hates*, even if an enemy may be hateful. The term refers to a "person who has a conflict with someone else and acts accordingly."¹⁸ Thus, the person is an adversary, that is, someone who contends with, opposes, or resists.
 - For languages that require a verbal idea, translators may consider something like *people who contend with you* or *people who act in conflict with you*.

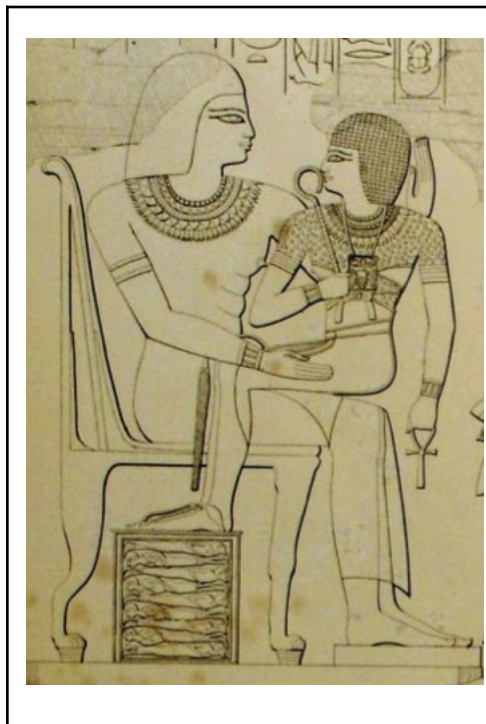
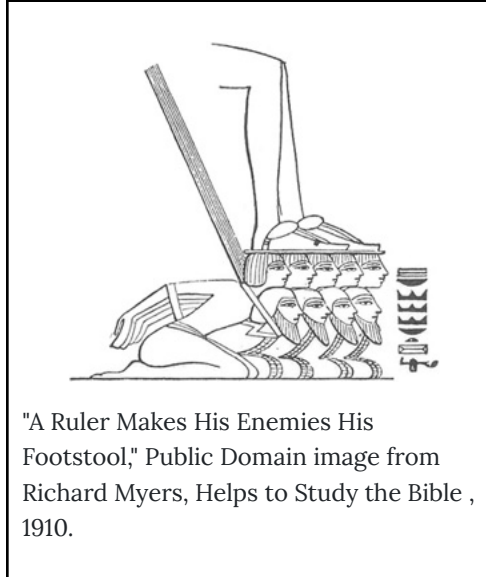
¹⁵ Leviticus 16.

¹⁶ Thus, as Emadi writes, "The language of "right hand" does more than metaphorically communicate authority, power, and kingship; it also highlights the messiah's privileged position of access to Yahweh. David's lord will reign from the very heavenly throne room of God... Thus, we do not have to wait until 110:4 to see the priestly identity of David's lord. Like the messianic picture in Psalm 2, the Davidic messiah will exercise kingly authority while enjoying priestly access to the very presence of God." Emadi 2016, 125-126; also Emadi 2022, *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology*.

¹⁷ GKC 164f.

¹⁸ SDBH.

- A **footstool** (הַדְּוֹם) refers to "a low stool... for resting the feet on when sitting," and it is "often associated with authority," such as the authority of a king.¹⁹ The important point is that in the biblical world, the placement of enemies under one's feet was a figure of speech to communicate authority and victory over those enemies.²⁰



¹⁹ SDBH.

²⁰ See, for example, Josh. 10:24; 1 Kgs. 5:17; Ps. 8:7.

"Painting: Abd el-Qurna: tomb of Hekaerneheh: Thut-mose IV (1422-1413 B.C.)" (Kiel 1997:255, 403). Image from Lepsius, Carl Richard. *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1859:Abth.III.BI.69.

- For cultures in which the image of a footstool is not available, or for cultures in which calling someone a footstool would not communicate authority and victory, translators can consider the following strategies:
 - It may be possible to render it as *the piece of wood where the feet rests (when sitting) or the resting place of the feet* (see 1 Chr 28:2 LXX) or *the place where the feet rest (when sitting)* (see Ps 132:7 LXX).
 - Several non-English translations drop the footstool image altogether and render the phrase *I put your enemies under your feet*. However, translators should not remove an image from poetry unless there is no good way to retain it. If translators pursue this strategy of removing the image, they should still seek to communicate the image's meaning of victory over enemies in the local language.²¹
 - Bratcher and Reyburn suggest something like "I will place your enemies under your power" or "I will make you defeat your enemies."²² Better would be to both keep the imagery and explain it within the text, such as *I will place your enemies under your authority, like a footstool under your feet* or *I will make your enemies like a footstool under your feet: completely under your control*.

VERSE 2

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH will extend your strong staff *the symbol of your royal rule* **from Zion** *the holy city in which you are enthroned.* *From Zion, your kingdom will spread to the ends of the earth.* Then you will **Rule among** *those who are currently* **your enemies!**

מַטֵּה עֲזָךְ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רִדְהָ בְּקֶרֶב אֹיְבֶיךָ:	2	YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion . Rule among your enemies!
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- Verses 1 and 2 are bound together as a unit by the repetition of the word **your enemies** (אֹיְבֶיךָ, see the note in verse 1) and by a special structure. In this special structure, the first and last phrases

²¹ Hausa CLB: *na sa abokan gābanka a karkashin kafafunka*. See also Hausa LMT, French BDS, PDV, NFC, Spanish NVI. An English translation that uses this strategy is the GNT.

²² Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 948.

contain repetition, then the second and second-to-last phrases contain repetition, and so on. This structure (called a *chiasm*) gives emphasis to the terms in the middle. Here in verses 1 and 2, the outer repetitions are verb forms (*imperatives* and *yiqtol*), and, importantly, the middle terms are symbols of royal rule (the **footstool** and **strong staff**). It looks like this:

- chiasm:
 - a imperative
 - b yiqtol
 - c "footstool"
 - c' "strong staff"
 - b' yiqtol
 - a' imperative
- repetition of **your enemies**

YHWH's oracle to my lord: "**Sit** at my right side,
until **I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.**"

YHWH **will extend your strong staff** from Zion.
Rule among **your enemies!**

- In verse 2, the psalmist begins to speak in his own voice, elaborating on YHWH's words in verse 1. So, the direct quotation of YHWH's words only occurs in verse 1 (and also later in verse 4).²³
- The phrase **your strong staff** (מַטֵּה-עֲזָרָה) has several notable features:
 - There are several words for **staff** in Hebrew. The word used here means a "stick, usually made of wood, used for walking or as an attribute of a ruler, also used for threshing" and "associated with authority and punishment."²⁴
 - In Hebrew, the phrase literally says *the staff of your strength*.²⁵ The second noun, *strength*, describes an attribute of the first noun, *staff*.
 - Thus, some translations have "strong staff" or "mighty scepter" (NIV, ESV, CSB).
 - Some translations make it clear that the king's **strong staff** is a symbol²⁶ for his kingdom: "your powerful kingdom" (NLT), "your royal power" (GNT), "your dominion" (NET). This is a useful strategy in cultures in which a staff cannot communicate power and authority.
 - The preferred method, if possible, is to combine the first two options, as in the Hausa CLB: *the staff of your kingdom/rule*.²⁷ This option has the benefit of retaining the staff imagery while adding a brief explanation of its meaning as a symbol of strength and authority.
 - The phrase **your strong staff** is in an unusual position in the Hebrew text. It has been placed at the front of its clause. This positioning not only has a poetic purpose (creating a *chiasm*; see the first note on this verse), but probably also signals a contrast with the **footstool** mentioned at the end of the previous clause. By fronting "your strong staff", the author indicates his transition from talking about one symbol of royal rule (the footstool) to another (the strong staff).

²³ Although YHWH speaks directly only in verses 1 and 4, there is a sense in which YHWH is speaking throughout the psalm, through the voice of his prophet.

²⁴ SDBH.

²⁵ This construction is called a *construct chain*.

²⁶ Specifically, this kind of symbol is called a *metonymy*. It is something related to a noun that takes the place of that noun.

²⁷ *sanda mulkinka*.

- Translators may choose to bring out this contrast with something like: *As for your strong staff, YHWH will extend it from Zion.*
- The phrase **extend...from Zion** means that the king's rule will reach out "from Jerusalem...to other lands" (as in the TEV).²⁸ So, a possible strategy is to render the clause something like: *the Lord will cause you to rule from Zion all the way to other lands.*
 - The word **Zion** refers to Jerusalem, and specifically to the hill upon which the temple was built. The city of Jerusalem was the religious and political center of the land of Israel, and it was associated with strong military defense. Zion was also associated with David (2 Sam 5:7), which is significant in this psalm (see also Psalm 2:6). The temple was the place where YHWH dwelled and therefore had his throne (Ps 9:11).²⁹ Since the word **Zion** will be unfamiliar in many cultures, translators may want to consider either 1) making the meaning clear with a rendering like *from Zion, the hill of God* or 2) providing an explanation in a footnote.
- The phrase **Rule among your enemies!** has some important features for the translator to consider:
 - The word **rule** is in the imperative form, and so some translations understand it to be a direct quotation of YHWH's words to the king. These translations render the phrase in quotation marks (NIV, NASB, GNB, REB). However, it is just as likely that the psalmist is speaking for YHWH here, and in that case, quotation marks are not necessary.
 - Though the word **rule** is in the imperative form, here it does not express a command. Rather, it is used "to express a distinct assurance... or promise."³⁰
 - Thus, some translations use the future tense here, such as: *and you will rule* (CEV, NLT, NIV84; see also French BDS: *tu domineras*; Hausa CLB: *za ka yi mulki*).
 - Translations that render this as a wish, such as *May the Lord extend your rule...* (French TOB), are not accurate.
 - The promise of rule that is expressed in this clause (verse 2b) happens *after* or *because of* what YHWH has done to extend the king's power in the previous clause (verse 2a). The relationship between the clauses is unexpressed in Hebrew.
 - Translators may choose to render the two clauses in a way that the logical relationship between these clauses is clear. If necessary, translators may supply a connector like *so* or *therefore*. The result would be something like *YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion, so rule among your enemies!*
 - For the phrase **among your enemies** (בְּקִרְבֵּי אֹיְבָיו), some translations have "over your enemies" (NLT, GNT). A potential issue with this translation is that it loses the sense of locational movement: the king's rule is extended "from Zion" (verse 2a) so that his kingdom is now "in the midst of" those who are outside Zion (verse 2b).

²⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 948.

²⁹ TDOT vol 12, 351-3.

³⁰ GKC 110c; cf. JM114p; IBHS 34.4c. Against Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 948.

- To deal with this problem, a possible strategy is that of the Hausa CLB, which combines a natural wording for "ruling over" with the location to describe the enemies: *over all your enemies around you!*³¹

VERSE 3

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

*In order for your royal rule to extend from Zion, you will need an army, and so YHWH will give you an army. **Your people will be willing** to fight for you and join your army **on the day you manifest your power** and gather an army for war. **On the holy mountains** which surround Zion, **from the womb of dawn** early in the morning as a sign of their willingness, your army, which might be compared to **the morning dew**, which falls on the mountains of Zion, that is, **your young men**, will come **into your possession**. Like dew, which falls from the sky as a gift from God, so your willing army is a gift from YHWH. And just as dew consists of innumerable drops and covers the ground, so your army will consist of innumerable people and overwhelm your enemies.*

עֲמַן נִדְבַת בְּנוֹם חֵילָךְ בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ מֵרַחֵם מִשְׁתַּחֲרָה לֹךְ טֶל יִלְדָּתֶיךָ:	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains , from the womb of dawn , the dew , your young men , [will come] into your possession .
--	---	---

- Verse 3 is, in the words of one Bible translation, "one of the most difficult texts in all the Bible" (see the footnote for more detail).³² The difficulty is largely due to textual issues. We follow the MT throughout verse 3 with one exception: we read **on holy mountains** (בְּהַרְרֵי קֹדֶשׁ) instead of "in holy garments" (בְּהַרְרֵי קֹדֶשׁ).
- The whole verse might be summarized as follows: "your people will join your war campaign voluntarily and in large numbers."³³
 - The first half of the verse states this literally ("your people will be willing on the day of your power").
 - The second half of the verse states this figuratively ("the willing volunteers will be like dew that covers the mountains at the break of dawn").
 - Thus, "the thought of the first half of the verse is repeated with an image and further painted out" in the second half of the verse.³⁴
- The first line of the verse, **your people will be willing on the day of your power**, has some important features:

³¹ *bisa dukan abokan gābanka kewaye da kai.*

³² DHH94I: "Este v. es uno de los textos más difíciles de toda la Biblia." Many translations have similar footnotes indicating that the interpretation of the Hebrew text is unclear. For a thorough discussion of the primary issues, see *The Text, Grammar, and Meaning of Ps. 110:3*.

³³ Hupfeld 1871, 200.

³⁴ Baethgen 1904, 338.

- The word **willing** (נָדְבָה) in Hebrew is a plural noun.³⁵ Here, the use of the plural instead of the singular indicates emphasis.³⁶
 - The NGÜ shows a possible translation strategy to bring out this emphasis: *with all their heart your people stand ready...*
- In Hebrew, this line lacks a verb, and so we have supplied the verb *will be* in our rendering. In English, the future tense is best here because the phrase **on the day of your power** (בְּיוֹם הַחֵילָךְ) describes a time yet to come: "your people *will be* willing on the day of your power." The phrase as a whole refers to the time when the king will go to war against his enemies.
 - Some languages may have both an imminent future tense and a distant future tense.³⁷ In such cases, it may be best to follow the grammar of the French translations that treat the line as a *zero conditional* that uses *when* and the present tense. In French, such a rendering puts the situation in the future without implying when in the future it will happen:
 - *Your people are (full of) devotion On the day (when you gather) your army* (NVS)³⁸
 - *Your people are full of ardor, when you gather your army* (S21).³⁹
- The word **power** (חֵיל) is often used in military contexts, and it often refers to an "army."⁴⁰ In this context, "the day of your power" is "the day of the waging of your war."⁴¹
 - Translators may find it helpful to make the reference to an army or military action clear, such as: *on the day you will lead your army* (Hausa CLB)⁴² or *on the day (when you gather) your army* (French NVS; PDV; NFC).⁴³

³⁵ Technically, the word can refer either to (1) a "voluntary/freewill offering," or (2) "voluntariness" or "freewill" in the abstract. Thus, Ps. 110:3a may say either (1) "your people are freewill offerings," or (2) "your people are freewill," in other words, "your people are willing, eager to volunteer." The second option is more likely in light of Judges 5, which twice describes people eagerly volunteering for battle: בָּהֶתְנַדְּבָם (Jdg. 5:2); הַמִּתְנַדְּבִים בָּעָם (Jdg. 5:9).

³⁶ GKC 141c; JM 154e; DCH.

³⁷ French has this grammatical feature, and none of the major French translations uses one of the future tenses.

³⁸ *Ton peuple est (plein de) dévouement Au jour (où tu rassembles) ton armée.*

³⁹ *Ton peuple est plein d'ardeur, quand tu rassembles ton armée.*

⁴⁰ BDB, DCH, HALOT. It is "used over 100 times in the sense of 'army'" (TWOT; 71 times according to NIDOTTE).

⁴¹ Targum. See NIV, JPS85, NLT, GNT, HFA; Baethgen 1904, 338; Waltke 2010, 506.

⁴² *a ranar da za ka bi da sojojinka.*

⁴³ *Au jour (où tu rassembles) ton armée.*

- The phrase **on holy mountains** (בְּהַרֵי קֹדֶשׁ) refers to the mountains around Jerusalem.⁴⁴ While many modern translations agree with our rendering,⁴⁵ a majority of modern translations follow the Masoretic Text in reading "holy garments."⁴⁶ The difference between the two readings is a single letter (ה vs. ג, which look nearly identical). Our preferred reading fits the context very well; for other arguments for and against our reading see [The Text, Grammar, and Meaning of Ps. 110:3](#).



Jerusalem mountains at sunrise. Photo by [Tom Shapira](#).

- The word **holy** is a key term. It means a "state in which humans or objects have become part of the realm of God and his service" and are "therefore no longer accessible to humans unless they have gone through special rituals."⁴⁷ It refers to divine beings, people, things, or places that are set apart, exclusive, important, and valuable. So, the opposite of **holy** is not *sinful* but rather *common*, *mundane*, or *ordinary*.
 - The Hebrew word we have rendered as **mountains** can refer to anything from a small hill to a mountain. The elevated areas around Jerusalem were not much more than hills, especially from the perspective of those who live in mountainous areas.
- The phrase **womb of dawn** is difficult, but it is probably a figure of speech that refers to the way in which the dew falls on the mountains early in the morning, at the break of dawn, as though the dawn were giving birth to the dew-like army of young men.
- The third line of the verse, **the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession**, has some important features:
 - Some cultures may lack a word for **dew**, which is moisture that covers the ground in the morning. To find a substitute, consider some possible connections that the psalmist might have meant to draw between the king's army and the dew:
 - Dew is a gift from God and a sign of his blessing.⁴⁸ The king's willing army is a gift to him from YHWH.
 - Dew consists of many drops⁴⁹ and it covers the ground.⁵⁰ The king's army is numerous and, therefore, powerful.

⁴⁴ Ps. 87:1; see also Ps. 125:2; 133:3.

⁴⁵ RSV, NRSV, GNT, NET, DHH94I, PDV2017, NFC.

⁴⁶ If we take the reading "holy garments," then it could mean that the king's army is an army of priests, just like the king himself is a priest (verse 4).

⁴⁷ SDBH.

⁴⁸ Gen. 27:28.

⁴⁹ Job 38:28.

⁵⁰ Judges 6:39; Num. 11:9.

- Dew comes in the morning.⁵¹ The king's army is eager to fight for him (coming early in the morning).
- Dew causes crops to grow and is therefore essential for flourishing in the land.⁵² The king's army will make him successful.
- The term we have rendered **your young men** literally means *youth* in Hebrew, and here it probably refers to the king's army.⁵³ Thus, the NIV renders it *your troops*. These young men are compared to the early-morning **dew** that falls on the mountains of Zion.
 - Grammatically speaking, the phrase **your young men** explains what the psalmist means by the **dew**: *the dew, that is, your young men or the dew, in other words, your young men*.⁵⁴
 - Some English translations make the comparison clear: *as the dew* (NASB95) or *like dew* (NIV, NRSV, GNB). In many languages, it will be important to make the comparison similarly clear. *Numerous as the dewdrops* may be another good option.
 - Other English translations seem to understand the **dew** to be a symbol of young age. Translators who understand the meaning in this way should be clear, such as *the dew that symbolizes the freshness of youth*. An example of an unclear rendering that probably intends this meaning is the ESV: *the dew of your youth* (see also NIV84, CSB, REB, NET). This rendering could easily mean *the dew that occurred when you were a youth*, which does not seem to fit here.
- The phrase we have translated as **[will come] into your possession** means that the young men come to belong to YHWH. The phrase lacks a verb in Hebrew. We have supplied **will come**. In Hebrew, coming to someone (using the Hebrew preposition לְ, as is the wording here) means coming into that person's possession.⁵⁵ The ESV has *will be yours*, and this is a possible rendering of the phrase.⁵⁶ The future tense is appropriate here since the psalmist is speaking of a future event.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

⁵¹ Ex. 16:13.

⁵² Gen. 27:28; Deut. 33:28; Hag. 1:10.

⁵³ The Hebrew root of the word youth (יָלַד) also corresponds with the mention of "womb" in the previous line, since יָלַד can refer to a baby that comes out of the womb.

⁵⁴ The terms **dew** and **your young men** are in a construct chain that expresses an equalizing relationship (BHRG §25.4.4).

⁵⁵ So, for example, the NRSV comes close but does not capture the fact of possession: *will come to you*.

⁵⁶ See also KJV, JPS, REB, NET, RVR95.

VERSES 4–7: YHWH's Confirmation

- The title of this section may be understood as YHWH confirms his king.
- YHWH makes his confirmation in the form of an oath, which is a solemn promise.
- This section is bound together by allusions to Genesis 14:
 - The section features Melchizedek (see Gen 14:18–20).
 - The section describes a battle against wicked kings (see Gen 14:1–16).
- The second half of the psalm (verses 4–7) echoes the first half of the psalm (verses 1–3):
 - The first part contains a quoted speech of YHWH (verse 4)
 - The second part contains an elaboration of that speech (verses 5–7)
 - The second part speaks of the king's rule over enemies (verse 5–6)
 - Then, the second part contains mention of water (**wadi**; verse 7)
 - For more detail see [Poetic Feature 1: Claimed and Confirmed](#).

VERSE 4

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

*Because you are seated on YHWH's throne, in YHWH's throne-room, a place only priests are permitted to enter, you are, therefore, a priest, and your priesthood is confirmed with an oath. **YHWH has sworn an oath, and he will not change his mind:** “You David's descendant and lord **are forever a priest** and, therefore, you will forever sit enthroned in my presence. Although you are not from the tribe of Levi, the tribe to which Israel's priests belong, one of the first kings in Zion, who was called “Melchizedek,” who was not a Levite, was both king and priest. You, therefore, are king and priest just like Melchizedek.”*

נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אַתָּה-כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דִּבְרֹתַי מֶלְכִּי־צִדֵּק:	4	YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: “You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek.”
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- Psalm 110:4 is based upon a story in Genesis 14:18–20, and translators should also take these Genesis verses into account when developing their translation of this verse. Psalm 110:4 is also quoted three times in the New Testament book of Hebrews:
 - Hebrews 7:21 quotes the first line of the verse and part of the second line.
 - Hebrews 5:6 and 7:17 quote the second line of the verse.
 - While translators should take these New Testament quotations into account, they should prioritize faithfulness to the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:4 before making any attempts to harmonize with the Greek quotations in the New Testament.
- Here the king's priestly status, which was implied in verse 1, is made clear and confirmed with an unchanging oath: **YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind:** “You are forever a priest...”
 - The purpose of an oath is to confirm the sincerity of a commitment to do or not do something. Thus, by swearing an oath, YHWH not only claims that the king is a priest, but YHWH also commits himself to ensuring the eternal continuation of the king's priestly status. The king will never cease to sit in YHWH's presence and on YHWH's throne.

- In modern English, the word *swear* with no direct object means to *use obscene or profane language*,⁵⁷ and that is not the meaning here. Other languages may also require a direct object for the verb **sworn**. In this case, possibilities include *sworn an oath*, *said/made a promise*, or *made a commitment*.
- Some languages may require an indirect object: *sworn to you*.
- Translators should be careful that the words chosen for *swearing an oath* in the target language do not imply ancestor worship or magic. Translators should also make sure that their rendering does not make it seem like the person swearing the oath or making the promise (in this case, YHWH) is someone of lower status than the person to whom the oath or promise is made.
- The Hebrew word we have rendered **change his mind** has a wide variety of meanings; the right one must be determined by context. Here, the meaning is tied to the oath (that is, the promise) that YHWH made to the king to make him a priest forever.
 - So, translations like *relent* (which implies that the oath is primarily about punishment; NKJV), or *repent* (which implies that YHWH has done something wrong; KJV, ASV, YLT) are inappropriate here.
 - In addition to 'change his mind,' other good translation possibilities include: *break his vow* (NLT); *take it back* (GNB, CSB); or *revoke it* (NET).
- The first line of this verse introduces a quotation of what YHWH says in the second line. In many languages, translators will need to make this introduction of the quotation clear by adding the word *saying* at the end of the first line (see Hausa CLB: *cewa*).
- The pronoun **you** in the quotation refers to David's lord. The present tense of the verb **you are...** is assumed from context.
- The word **priest** is a key term that refers to a "person ordained and consecrated to perform religious services on behalf of others."⁵⁸ Translators should ensure that the word they choose matches other biblical instances of the term, particularly in Genesis 14:18.
- The phrase translated **just like** (עַל־דִּבְרָתִי) occurs only here, and it probably means "in relation to." So, the whole phrase might be translated *like Melchizedek*.⁵⁹
 - Some English translations render this phrase as *after the order of* (ESV, KJV), *according to the order of* (NASB, NRSV), *in the order of* (NIV). Though the word *order* can mean "a group of people united in a formal way,"⁶⁰ in modern popular English, the word *order* usually connotes a command, which is not the meaning here. Translators may want to consider the GNB's rendering, which makes the priestly nature of the order clear: *in the priestly order of*. Other acceptable renderings that communicate the meaning well are *according to the pattern of* (CSB), *after the pattern of* (NET), *according to the manner of* (LEB).

⁵⁷ Mirriam-Websters.

⁵⁸ SDBH.

⁵⁹ See [The Grammar and Meaning of Ps. 110:4](#).

⁶⁰ Mirriam-Websters.

- The king in Ps. 110 is like Melchizedek primarily in the sense that he, like Melchizedek, is both king and priest in Jerusalem.⁶¹
- Although some translations read **Melchizedek** (מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק) as a phrase ("a rightful king"),⁶² the term is most likely a title or a name, and thus refers to Melchizedek from Gen. 14:18.⁶³
 - So, the preferred strategy is that the name should be transliterated using the same name found in Genesis 14:18 and Hebrews 5:6, 7:17.
 - Since the meaning of the name is significant, translators could consider including the meaning of the name, *king of righteousness*, within the text along with the name Melchizedek, or separately in a footnote.

VERSE 5

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

This is *what I, David, saw in my vision*: **The Lord**, that is, YHWH, who stands in battle **at your**, that is, my lord, the king's, **right side** to protect you and to fight on your behalf because you have served him as a faithful priest **smashed rebellious kings on the day his anger was unleashed** just as he defeated wicked kings in Melchizedek's day.

אֲדֹנָי עַל־יְמִינִי מִחַץ בְּיוֹם־אַפּוֹ מְלָכִים:	5	The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.
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- Verses 5-7 describe a vision in which God gives the king victory over his enemies.
- Back in verse 1, the word **lord** ("my lord": אֲדֹנָי) referred to the king, who was invited to sit at YHWH's "right side" (יְמִין). Here in verse 5, though, the word **lord** (אֲדֹנָי) refers to YHWH, who is at the king's right side (יְמִין). It looks like this:

⁶¹ Gen. 14:18.

⁶² JPS85.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion, see [The Grammar and Meaning of Ps. 110:4](#).

לְדוֹד מְזִמּוֹר	1	A psalm by David.
נֹאמַם יְהוָה לְאַדְנִי יָשֵׁב לְיָמִינִי עַד-אֲשֵׁית אֹיְבֵיךָ הָדָם לְרִגְלֶיךָ:		YHWH's oracle to my lord : "Sit at my right side , until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
מִטֵּה-עֲזָרָה יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן רְדֵה בְּקִרְבֵּי אֹיְבֶיךָ:	2	YHWH will extend your strong staff from Zion. Rule among your enemies!
עַמְּךָ נִדְבַח בְּיוֹם חִילֶךָ בְּהַרְרֵי-קָדֹשׁ מִרְחֹם מִשְׁחָר לֶךָ טַל יִלְדְּתִיךָ:	3	Your people will be willing on the day you manifest your power. On holy mountains, from the womb of dawn, the dew, your young men, [will come] into your possession.
נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אַתָּה-כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דְּבָרָתִי מִלְכִּי-צֶדֶק:	4	YHWH has sworn, and he will not change his mind: "You are forever a priest just like Melchizedek."
אֲדֹנִי עַל-יְמִינֶךָ מִחַץ בְּיוֹם-אַפּוֹ מִלְּכִים:	5	The Lord at your right side smashed kings on the day his anger was unleashed.

- At times, it is difficult to tell whether the subject of the clauses in verses 5-7 is the psalmist's king, or it is YHWH. This is especially true in verse 7. This vagueness may be intentional – for David, the identity of YHWH and the king may be so close that they are difficult to tell apart. In sum, though, we believe that the subject throughout verses 5-7 is most likely YHWH. For more detail, see [Poetic Feature 2: The Lord and the lord](#).
- The two lines in verse 5 may be either one clause ("YHWH, who is at your right hand, has crushed...")⁶⁴ or two clauses ("YHWH is at your right hand. He has crushed...").⁶⁵
- The phrase **The Lord at your right side** (אֲדֹנִי עַל-יְמִינֶךָ) is an unusual position in Hebrew. It is placed at the front of its clause for emphasis. The emphasis is on confirming that it is indeed YHWH and no one else who subdued the king's enemies.
 - In English, the emphasis might look something like this: "(Yes), it's *the Lord*, who is at your right hand, who smashed kings... He is the one who subdues your enemies for you."
 - This emphasis on confirming YHWH's identity as the one who defeats enemies fits well with the overall mood and purpose of the psalm, which is to assure the king that YHWH is going to take care of his enemies for him.
- In verse 1, the king who was at YHWH's **right side** was in a position of honor. The same Hebrew word we have rendered as **right side** is used in verse 5 also, forming a poetic link between the two verses. However, here it is YHWH who is at the king's **right side** – the positions are reversed. In this case, for YHWH to be at the king's **right side** shows that YHWH is in a position of power and strength, able to protect the king and fight for him (verses 5b-7).

⁶⁴ KJV, NEB, LUT, ELB

⁶⁵ NIV, NLT, ESV, REB, JPS85, GNT, CEV, HFA, NGÜ, ZÜR.

- The subject throughout verses 5-7 is probably YHWH. YHWH is named as the subject in verse 5a, and "there is no indication in the sequence of clauses in vv. 5-7 that we should assume a change of subject."⁶⁶
 - So, even though it is difficult to distinguish between YHWH and the king in Hebrew thought, readings that imply the king is the subject of these verses (NJB, NET) are not preferred.
- The tense(s) of the verbs in verses 5-7 (smashed... will rule... filled... smashed... will drink... will lift) are treated in a variety of ways in the modern translations.⁶⁷ The most important thing about these verbs is that they describe events that will take place on or after a future "day of his anger" (בְּיוֹם-אַפּוֹ, verse 5b).
 - The verbs in the phrases **smashed kings** (verse 5b), **filled with corpses** (verse 6a), and **smashed heads** (verse 6b) refer to events that happen on "the day of his anger," which is a day in the future. The reason we have rendered these verbs as past tense is that they are in a Hebrew verb form (*qatal prophetic perfect*) that describes "events which occurred in a vision or in a dream."⁶⁸ A good way to think about what is happening in verses 5-7 is this: 1) the psalmist sees a vision of what will happen in the future, 2) when the vision is over, he reports what he has seen, and 3) from the perspective of the psalmist, then, the report about the events can use the past tense. For example: "I saw a vision of the future. In it, YHWH smashed kings..."
 - Most translations translate these verbs using the future tense. This is also an accurate translation ("he will smash kings...he will fill with corpses...he will smash heads).
 - Some modern translations render all of the verbs in the present tense.⁶⁹ However, the entire psalm is a prophetic report that describes future events (see the notes on the term **prophetic oracle** in verse 1). So, translations that render the verbs in the present tense are inaccurate.
 - The verbs in the phrases **will rule** (verse 6a), **will drink** (verse 7a) and **will lift** (verse 7b) are in a different verb form (*yiqtol*) from the verbs **smashed** and **filled**. This verb form describes events that happen *after* the day of YHWH's wrath. Once YHWH has destroyed all of the kings, he will drink from the wadi, and he will rule the nations, and he will lift his head.
- The word **smashed** is a repeated word in this psalm that also appears in verse 6b. The word appears only in poetic texts and has very strong associations with violence and gore—smashing "heads" is especially common.⁷⁰ The following diagram compares the Hebrew term with the English word *smash*. Definitions in the yellow left side apply only to the English word, while definitions in the green right side apply only to the Hebrew word. Definitions in the middle, where the shapes overlap, apply to both the English and Hebrew words:

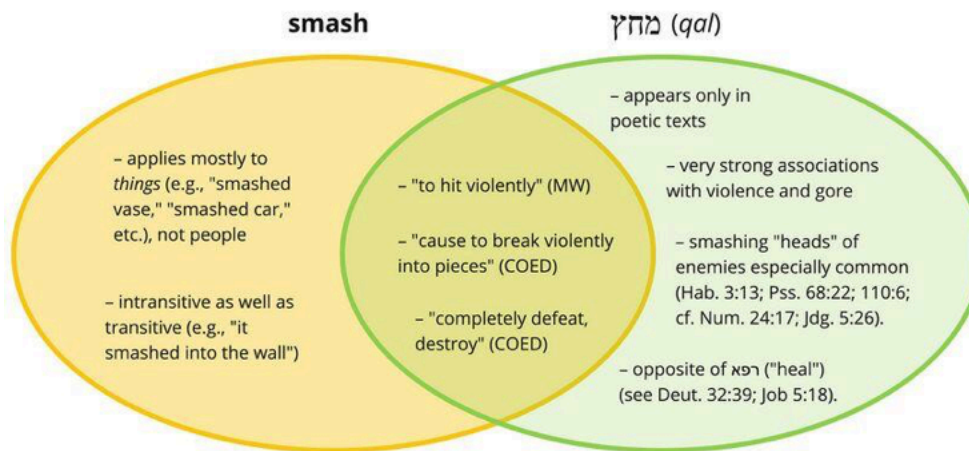
⁶⁶ Zenger 2011, 143; and Goldingay 2008. For a detailed discussion of the issue, see [The Subject\(s\) in Ps. 110:5-7](#).

⁶⁷ Some translations render all of the verbs as future tense (NIV, NLT, ESV, GNT, CEV, LUT), some as present (JPS85, NJB, NET), and some with a combination of past and future tense (LXX, Jerome, Peshitta; cf. NEB).

⁶⁸ Rogland 2003, 71.

⁶⁹ JPS85, NJB, NET.

⁷⁰ See Hab. 3:13; Pss. 68:22; 110:6; also Num. 24:17; Jdg. 5:26.



- The phrase **on the day his anger was unleashed** is literally *on the day of his anger* in Hebrew. However, this refers not just to *the day when he gets/becomes angry* (CEV, GNT). Instead, the whole psalm looks forward to a future time of God's action (it is eschatological). So, the phrase refers specifically to *the day of judgment* (HFA), and translators may likewise consider adding reference to judgment to make the meaning clear. Since the Hebrew phrase refers to the judgment day when YHWH will not only become angry but will also act upon his anger by punishing the wicked, we have added the words **was unleashed**. This is similar to the NET translation: *the day he unleashes his anger* (see also NGÜ).
- The word **smash** is one of several connections between Psalm 110 and Balaam's final oracle in Numbers 24:15–19. Similarly, Psalm 110's connection with Genesis 14 is not limited to the mention of Melchizedek (in verse 4). Both passages include a worldwide battle against wicked kings that ends in the winner drinking. See [Poetic Feature 3: Pentateuchal Prophecy](#) for more detail.

VERSE 6

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

When YHWH has slain all of the rebellious kings, **He** himself will become king in their place, and **will rule** with justice **among the nations whom he filled with corpses**. *Because the lord shares YHWH's throne, the lord also will rule among the nations whom YHWH filled with corpses.* In my vision, **He**, that is, YHWH, **smashed the heads** of the rebellious kings **across the wide world** and so he has extended the lord's scepter from Zion and made his enemies a footstool for his feet.

יְדִין בְּגוֹיִם מְלָא גְּיוֹת מִחֵץ רֹאשׁ עַל־אֶרֶץ רְבֹהָ:	6	He will rule among the nations whom he filled with corpses. He smashed heads across the wide world .
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- Most modern translations understand the verb **he will rule** (יְדִין) to refer to YHWH judging (and punishing) the nations. The verb may also, however, refer to "broader tasks of establishing and

maintaining order (through governing and administering)," and, in the Psalms, it sometimes refers to "God's sovereign rule over ... the nations in general."⁷¹ So verse 6a may say that YHWH, once he has destroyed the wicked kings, will rule justly over the nations.

- The prepositional phrase **among the nations** (בְּגוֹיִם) probably indicates the place where the ruling/judgment takes place. The preposition **among** (בְּ) "indicates that the peoples whom he judges are gathered around him."⁷² The word often refers to non-Israelite nations when used in the plural, as it is here.⁷³
- In verse 6a, most translations say *fill with corpses*, but some translations follow a variant Hebrew text to say *fill the valleys with corpses* (NET, ELB). Not much about the meaning changes by following this rendering.
- We have supplied the word **whom** in the clause *whom he filled with corpses*, so that what is filled is the **nations** (גוֹיִם). The need to supply a word like *whom* is not uncommon when rendering certain Hebrew constructions into English.⁷⁴ Several modern translations provide other strategies to arrive at the same meaning (in which the corpses fill the nations) such as:
 - "He will execute judgment among the nations, *filling them* with corpses" (ESV).
 - "He will judge among the nations; *he will fill them* with corpses" (LEB, see Hausa CLB⁷⁵).
 - Both of the above strategies supply the direct object *them*. They also make the verb tense simultaneous with the tense of the first verb of the sentence.
- For the meaning and tense of the verb **smashed** (מָחַץ), see notes on v. 5.
- The word **heads** is a singular noun (רֹאשׁ) in Hebrew, but it may be understood collectively and therefore translated as plural.⁷⁶
 - In some translations, the **heads** are a figure of speech for rulers/kings. Given the close relationship of verse 6b with verse 5b, which mentions kings, the word **heads** may be short for *the heads of kings*. This is the reading of the NIV: *the rulers of the whole earth* (see also ELB).
 - However, in this context it is unlikely that the word **heads** is a figure of speech for leaders, because the verb **smash** is often associated with the smashing of literal heads.⁷⁷ So, this reading is dispreferred.
- The phrase **across the wide world** (עַל אֶרֶץ רְבָה) has a few features for the translator to consider:
 - The phrase **the wide world** conveys that the action happens everywhere. English translations that capture this well include *the wide earth* (ESV, NRSV); *the whole earth* (NIV, NLT); *the entire world* (CSB). The rendering *a broad country* (NASB95) is too focused on a single

⁷¹ NIDOTTE. See Pss. 7:9; 9:9; 96:10.

⁷² DCH; Baethgen 1904, 339.

⁷³ SDBH.

⁷⁴ This is known as an asyndetic relative clause. It is a clause in which the translator must supply a relative pronoun such as "whom" or "which."

⁷⁵ *Zai yanke wa al'ummai shari'a, yā ciccika su da gawawwaki.*

⁷⁶ As in Ps. 68:22 (רֹאשׁ אֶרֶץ).

⁷⁷ In Ps. 68:22 and Hab. 3:13 - both of which contain the verb "smash" - the word "head" refers not to leaders but to the literal body part.

country, which is unlikely to be the meaning of the Hebrew here, since the phrase is in parallel with the phrase *among the nations* that is in the first half of the verse.

- The phrase **across the wide world** could be behaving in one of two different ways:
 - It may attach to the verb **smashed**, so that the phrase describes the scope of the act of smashing. This is the understanding of the NET translation: *shatters their heads over the vast battlefield*, and the JPS: *crushing heads far and wide* (see also EÜ). This is the preferred reading.
 - It may attach to the noun **heads**, and therefore describe the scope of the power of these "heads." In this reading, the "heads" are a figure of speech for "rulers/kings," which is a dispreferred reading (see the note above).

VERSE 7

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

*After smashing the heads of enemy kings, like a warrior who is weary from battle **He**, that is, YHWH, **will drink from a wadi on the campaign**. The fact that he is able to pause to refresh himself with water in enemy territory is a sign that he has successfully conquered his enemy. **Therefore** refreshed from his drink and confident in his victory, **he will lift his head** in victorious triumph over his enemies whose heads have been smashed.*

מִנְחַל בְּדָרֶךְ יִשְׁתָּה עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ׃	7	He will drink from a wadi on the campaign . Therefore, he will lift his head.
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- Verses 5-7 seem to describe a single vision in which YHWH, like a warrior, crushes his enemies and refreshes himself with a drink. It is common in the Bible to describe YHWH as a human warrior (Exod. 15:3; Ps 78:65). It is natural for the warrior, having smashed heads across the wide world, to drink water to refresh himself.⁷⁸ More significant is the fact that he drinks water in enemy territory, which is an action that shows dominance over enemies.⁷⁹
 - In many modern translations, translators insert the king as the subject of verse 7 (*le roi*, PDV). However, there is no clear subject change in Hebrew. See the notes on [verse 5](#).
- YHWH drinks from a **wadi**. A wadi is "a relatively steep and narrow valley following the course of a stream, which is often dry, except for the rainy season."⁸⁰
 - English translations render this word as either *brook* or *stream*, both of which can inform the translator's choice for a local vocabulary word.
 - In the larger poetic structure of the psalm, the mention of a wadi in verse 7 parallels the mention of **dew** in verse 4. See [Poetic Feature 1: Claimed and Confirmed](#) for more detail.
- The phrase translated **on the campaign** (בְּדָרֶךְ) is, literally, "on the way/road/path." In the military context of these verses, "on the way/road/path" probably refers to the warrior's campaign (see 1 Samuel 15:18, 20). The word 'campaign' is definite (*the* campaign, not *a* campaign) because we can

⁷⁸ See Judges 15:15-19.

⁷⁹ See 2 Kings 19:24 // Isa. 37:25.

⁸⁰ SDBH.

identify it from the preceding verses. In verses 2 and 5, the conquering of enemies outside of Zion suggests a "journey" or "campaign."

- The phrase **on the campaign** (בַּדֶּרֶךְ) might be attached to either:
 - (1) the wadi: "a wadi [which is located] on the journey/campaign."⁸¹ This is the preferred option based on word order.⁸²
 - (2) the act of drinking: "he will drink on the campaign, from a wadi."⁸³
- The whole phrase **from a wadi on the campaign** is placed in an unusual order in Hebrew. It is at the front of the clause to emphasize that the warrior takes a drink from a wadi while on the military campaign, that is, the king drinks from water in enemy territory. Drinking the water that is in a foreign land during or after battle is an act that shows dominance over that land.
- The phrase **therefore, he will lift his head** has some important features:
 - The word **therefore** (עַל־כֵּן) introduces the outcome of previously stated actions, events, or reasons. In this case, the action **he will lift his head** is the outcome of having drunk the enemy's water; now he is refreshed and confident that his victory is complete.
 - To **lift his head** is a figure of speech that symbolizes the joy that comes when someone has victory over their enemies. Some translations may choose to make the subject of the verb meaning clear: *he will lift his head in victory*.
 - The subject of the verb **lift** is YHWH, and the **head** belongs to YHWH. In some languages, it may be helpful to make the subject of the verb clear: *YHWH will lift his head*.
 - The same word for **head** appeared in verse 6. Thus, there is a poetic contrast in the psalm between YHWH smashing the kings' heads in verse 6 and YHWH's lifting his own head here in verse 7. If possible, the translator should render the two instances using the same root word in the local language.

⁸¹ NET, GNT, HFA, GNB.

⁸² The second option seems to be supported by the Masoretic accentuation, which separates the phrases "from a wadi" and "on the campaign" with a disjunctive accent. The first option, however, provides a much simpler explanation of the word order, since, according to the first option, only one constituent ("from a wadi on the campaign") is fronted.

⁸³ ELB, EÜ, ZÜR, NGÜ, RVR95, DHH.

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