



Psalm 45 - Ode for a Royal Wedding

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of the Korahites. A Maskil. A love song.

Introduction

This is a hymn celebrating a royal wedding; as the title says, it is a love song. It is impossible to be sure for which king in David's line the song was first composed, but it does not matter; after 2 Samuel 7:11-16, the line of David was the appointed channel through which God would bless his people and carry out his mission to the whole world. The psalm has sometimes been taken as directly messianic, because Hebrews 1:8-9 cites vv.6-7, applying the verses to Christ.

The Korahites were Levites from the family of Kohath and were descended from Korah. By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19). Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers Chapter 16). God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, but the sons of Korah remained. Perhaps they were so grateful for this mercy that they became notable in Israel for praising God.

Psalm 45:1 - A Song for a King

Whether these words are to be sung by the congregation or by a choir, they are addressed to the king. As a psalm, used in Jerusalem, this would refer to a king in David's line. Its title is reminiscent of: <<*Solomon's Song of Songs*>> (Song 1:1).

- ¹ My heart overflows with a goodly theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

Psalm 45:1

My heart overflows with a goodly theme. The tone of this psalm is a good theme. There is a sense of joy and celebration throughout the psalm. Yet these words also hint that the psalmist had a sense of inspiration in writing this, as if the good theme flowed up within him.

I address my verses to the king. The idea is either that this psalm is about the king or it is to the king. It celebrates a royal wedding, but there is no firm place to connect it to a specific king in the royal house of David. Many older commentators regard the wedding as Solomon's to the princess of Egypt, but this is not certain. At the same time, the text of the psalm itself and the way the NT quotes this psalm requires a Christian to regard its general tone and many of its specific lines to speak of the ultimate King, Jesus the Messiah.

A ready scribe was probably one who wrote quickly, neatly and accurately.

Psalm 45:2-9 - You Are a King of Beauty, Majesty, and Justice

These words speak to the king, praising him for his appearance and gracious speech (v.2), military power (v.3), and commitment to promoting justice for his subjects (vv.4-7a). These words focus the attention of a young king on the ideals he should hold for his reign and character. These are what lead to God's blessing for his people's king, and to the king's own respected position in the world (vv.7b-9).

- 2 You are the most handsome of men;
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you for ever.
- 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,
in your glory and majesty.
- 4 In your majesty ride on victoriously
for the cause of truth and to defend the right;
let your right hand teach you dread deeds.
- 5 Your arrows are sharp
in the heart of the king's enemies;
the peoples fall under you.

Psalm 45:2-5

You are the most handsome of men. This begins a poetic and powerful description of the king, praising and exalting him both for who he is and what he does. The psalmist began by simply noting the beauty of the king, saying he is more handsome than all others. The emphasis here seems to be on the character of the Messiah, on the beauty of his nature and personality. Isaiah 53:2 says that the Messiah was not remarkable for his physical appearance or beauty. Fulfilled in Jesus Christ, it can therefore be said that there was never a more beautiful human being than Jesus of Nazareth.

Grace is poured upon your lips. The beauty of the king extends to his words, which are filled with grace. His grace-blessed lips speak grace-filled words. This was marvellously true of Jesus Christ. In his early years it was said: <<*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth*>> (Luke 4:22a). Even the opponents of Jesus said: <<*Never has anyone spoken like this!*>> (John 7:46b).

Therefore God has blessed you for ever. In the beauty of his character and the graciousness of his words, the king enjoys the blessing of God, and enjoys it forever. The phrase therefore God also suggests that there is an aspect or dimension to deity that is not encompassed in the king spoken of in this psalm. There is an aspect or dimension of God that deals with him and blesses him.

Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one. The king is beautiful in character and speaks grace-filled words, but is nothing like a soft or effeminate man. This king is a man of war, a mighty one armed with a sword. The phrasing of this psalm is likely the source of some of the phrasing of John's description of Jesus returning in triumph in Revelation 19:11-16.

In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right. The king is full of majesty and blessing, but not primarily out of conquest and force. It flows from his truth, humility, and righteousness.

Let your right hand teach you dread deeds. In the thinking of ancient Israel the right hand spoke of a person's strength and skill, because most people are right handed. This means that the exercise of the strength and skill of the king teaches him, and teaches him awesome deeds. Applying this to Jesus Christ may seem strange. One may wonder what awesome deeds Jesus learned through his own right hand. Hebrews 5:8 says of Jesus that he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Jesus learned the practice of obedience in the fiery test of his own suffering. This was an exercise of his strength and skill, and one of the dread deeds he learned.

Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies. The weapons of the king are many. He not only has a sword, but also sharp arrows, ready and sent out

against his enemies. His might brings the world into submission, i.e. the peoples fall under You: <<*The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’*>> (Psalm 110:1), and: <<*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

⁶ Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever.

Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity;

⁷ you love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you

with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

^{8a} your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

Psalm 45:6-8a

Your throne, O God. Many have supposed that these words must address the Davidic king, either as foretelling Christ or as a type that Christ would eventually fulfil. Although the OT does foretell a divine Messiah: <<*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*>> (Isaiah 9:6), this kind of interpretation does not easily fit this context. It seems better to think that the song speaks to God about his throne, namely, the one that the heir of David occupies, and then goes on to describe the divine ideals for a king's reign i.e. a sceptre of equity. Hebrews 1:8-9 cites these verses in Greek from the Septuagint as part of the author's argument that the Son is superior to the angels. Hebrews Chapter 1 applies the term Son to Jesus, probably in his role as the heir of David. Thus Hebrews 1:5 puts Psalm 2:7 with 2 Samuel 7:14, where 'Son of God' is a title for the Davidic king; refer to the comment made on Psalm 2:7. This also accounts for the use of the messianic 110:1 in Hebrews 1:3 and 1:13. Hebrews does go on, like the rest of the NT, to apply to Jesus an OT passage about Yahweh.

Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity. This king's reign is not founded on mere aggression and conquest; it is not merely a matter of might making right. His kingdom is founded with righteousness, so much so that the symbol of his authority, a sceptre, is righteousness itself.

In ancient times the king's sceptre was a symbol of his power and authority. People would be summoned into his presence with it: <<*All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to*

the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law – all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days>> (Esther 4:11).

You love righteousness and hate wickedness. The righteousness of his kingdom comes from the character of the king. It is the natural result of his love of righteousness and his hate towards wickedness. He does not have to work hard to make his kingdom righteous; it is in his nature and character.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. Because of his great righteousness, Messiah the King receives a blessing from God. He is blessed with the oil of gladness, he is glad and satisfied, and that more than any other, beyond your companions. He is an anointed King. It is true that Jesus was a man of suffering, well acquainted with infirmity and grief (Isaiah 53:3). Yet his work of righteousness, in all its fullness and dimensions, was rewarded as the most joyful and satisfying work ever performed. Despite the sorrow and grief in his work, the accomplishment of Jesus' work left him anointed with the oil of gladness, and that more than any other person.

The person of the anointed King is described in a fascinating way. In v.6 he himself is addressed as God; now in v.7 the King is described as relating to God, from whom he has received an anointing. This is a strange statement, this King is God, and yet receives from God. Passages like this are the foundation for the idea of the Trinity, that there is one God who exists in three persons. This is the way to make sense of what seems to be contradictory statements in the Bible:

- That there is one God: <<*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*>> (Deuteronomy 6:4 NIV), and: <<*Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one*>> (Galatians 3:20).
- That three persons are said to be God, and they relate to one another, here and in many other passages of Scripture.

Psalm 45 shows a striking interaction between the persons of the Trinity. 'God, your God' speaks of the Father and his position of authority over the second person of the Trinity. 'You' refers to the Son. 'Anointed' has in mind the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. This is another reference to the beauty and pleasantness of the anointed king. In some way it could be said that he smells good, giving a more complete picture of his beauty and pleasantness. One might imagine a very good-looking man of remarkable character, righteousness and courage, who nevertheless smells bad and is therefore unpleasant to be around. Jesus is never like that!

8b From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;
9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honour;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

Psalm 45:8b-9

From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad. The psalmist thought of not just a palace but multiple palaces, so majestic that they were inlaid and decorated with ivory. One could think of majestic palaces worthy of Solomon in his splendour, pointing towards the white and pure dwelling place of God in heaven. Prophetically speaking, from ivory palaces reveals that the anointed king comes from heaven. He is not only of earth, but came forth from palaces found only in heaven: <<*No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man*>> (John 3:13), and: <<*The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all*>> (John 3:31).

Daughters of kings are among your ladies of honour. The anointed king is great not only for who he is, but also for those he associates with. The highest royalty, i.e. daughters of kings and the queen, are the maids of honour at his wedding. Prophetically speaking this is a reminder that one measure of the greatness and majesty of Jesus is to see the greatness of the men and women through the centuries who have been his most devoted followers. These were and are men and woman <<*of whom the world was not worthy*>> (Hebrews 11:38a).

At your right hand stands the queen. The wedding is about to begin, with the bride, i.e. the queen, standing in the place of honour next to the king.

Ophir was a port on the Red Sea coast of modern day Saudi Arabia famous for its fine gold: <<*They went to Ophir, and imported from there four hundred and twenty talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon*>> (1 Kings 9:28), <<*It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire*>> (Job 28:16), and: <<*I will make mortals more rare than fine gold, and humans than the gold of Ophir*>> (Isaiah 13:12).

Psalm 45:10-13a - O Bride, Honour This King

Now the song turns to the bride; her loyalty now is to her husband the king, and no longer to her father's house. The reference to her people need not mean that she is from a foreign people, although it would fit for Solomon's Egyptian queen or indeed his many other foreign wives; the word can simply mean the people of her hometown. In her new position, she will receive honour from the king's subjects.

10 Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear;
forget your people and your father's house,
11 and the king will desire your beauty.
Since he is your lord, bow to him;
12 the people of Tyre will seek your favour with gifts,
the richest of the people ^{13a} with all kinds of wealth.

Psalm 45:10-13a

Hear, O daughter. Now the psalmist turned to the bride and spoke to her. He had encouragement and guidance for her.

Forget your people and your father's house. Using the concept of Genesis 2:24, this was an invitation to this particular royal daughter to leave her people and her father's house to be joined to the anointed king in marriage. If nothing else was known of this king, it might be thought that this described a literal invitation to marriage to an actual woman to literally become his wife. Knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Messiah and the King, and that he was never married during his earthly life, it can be understood that this connects with a familiar metaphor: the people of God as a wife of God, and the church of Jesus as his bride.

The king will desire your beauty. One reason the king invited the royal daughter to marriage was he saw her as beautiful, and so desired her. Since the king's beauty was that of character (v.2), one can be sure that the bride's beauty included character. Extending the analogy, Jesus, Messiah and King, sees the beauty of his people collectively, the church, and so wants he desires them in committed relationship, in the sharing of all things, in a future linked together: <<*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish*>> (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Since he is your lord, bow to him. This has the sense of something greater than the normal respect due unto a husband, even a royal husband. This bride, this royal daughter, sees that her husband is also her Lord and worthy of worship.

The people of Tyre will seek your favour with gifts. Being joined to the anointed king in marriage means many benefits for this royal daughter. She receives gifts from the nations, and is set in such a high place that even the rich seek her favour. Normally, others seek the favour of the rich; the anointed king has set her in an even higher place.

Psalm 45:13b-15 - The Bride's Procession

Now the song describes the splendid attire of the princess bride as she leaves her chamber and is led to the king, accompanied by a procession of virgin companions.

- 13b The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes;
14 in many-coloured robes she is led to the king;
behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.
15 With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.

Psalm 45:13b-15

The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes. Because she is joined to the anointed king in a relationship of committed love, great benefits come to the royal daughter. She is all glorious, and not because of herself but because of her connection with the king. She is clothed with valuable and beautiful clothing. She has several many-coloured robes, which she wears in the presence of the king. The gold-woven robe is reminiscent of the high priest's splendid garment: <<*Gold leaf was hammered out and cut into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns and into the fine twisted linen, in skilled design*>> (Exodus 39:3).

Behind her the virgins, her companions, follow. The royal daughter, wife to the anointed king, is accompanied by bridesmaids and together they come before the king for the wedding service.

With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king. There is to be great joy as the bride is brought into the presence of her new husband: <<*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*>> (Revelation 19:6-8)

Psalm 45:16-17 - O King, Your Line Will Continue in Your Sons

The song turns back to the king and speaks of his enduring line. The marriage of a Davidic king is not a private matter; it is crucial for the fulfilling of God's promises, not simply to Israel but to the nations.

- 16 In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.
- 17 I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations;
therefore the peoples will praise you for ever and ever.

Psalm 45:16-17

In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. A blessing is pronounced on the marriage of the anointed king. The fathers have passed away, but will be replaced by sons that come from the marriage. The king's legacy passes from generation to generation. This ongoing work means that the name of the king will **be celebrated in all generations.** The metaphors are a bit mixed, but the idea is clear. The union between the Messiah and his bride brings forth children who themselves are princes in all the earth, i.e. <<***bringing many children to glory***>> (Hebrews 2:10b).

Therefore the peoples will praise you for ever and ever. The result of it all is that the anointed king is exalted and praised, and that forever and ever. His choosing of a bride, granting great privileges to her, and giving a blessing that endures through generations all bring praise to him.