

Psalm 45

“The King Enthroned Forever”

“For the choir director; according to the Shoshannim. A Maskil of the sons of Korah. A Song of Love. My heart overflows with a good theme; I address my verses to the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever. Gird Your sword on Your thigh, O Mighty One, in Your splendor and Your majesty! And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let Your right hand teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under You; *your arrows are* in the heart of the King's enemies. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. All Your garments are *fragrant with* myrrh and aloes and cassia; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made You glad. Kings' daughters are among Your noble ladies; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear: Forget your people and your father's house; then the King will desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord, bow down to Him. The daughter of Tyre *will come* with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favor. The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is interwoven with gold. She will be led to the King in embroidered work; the virgins, her companions who follow her, will be brought to You. They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing; they will enter into the King's palace. In place of your fathers will be your sons; You shall make them princes in all the earth. I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore the peoples will give You thanks forever and ever.”

When Bible readers turn to the text of Psalm 45, they are likely to read some sort of heading along the lines of “Ode for a Royal Wedding,”¹⁹⁵ and assume that some kind of human figure, a monarch of Ancient Israel such as King David, or a subsequent figure in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, is likely in some sort of view. There are various ascriptions seen in Psalm 45, which could be normative to apply to a mortal of prestige: “You are the most excellent of men” (Psalm 45:2a, NIV); “In your majesty ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right” (Psalm 45:4a, RSV); “All your robes *are fragrant* with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from ivoried palaces lutes entertain you. Royal princesses are your favorites; the consort stands at your right hand, decked in gold of Ophir” (Psalm 45:9-10, NJPS). The language of the psalm, which is taken from some wedding venue within Ancient Israel, employs terminology and symbolism from the monarchs of the Ancient Near East—kings to be regarded as handsome, keen in battle, rich, and possessing an esteemed court of nobles. Nancy deClaissé-Walford offers a reasonable, basic summary of what the psalm directs:

“However one may interpret it...Psalm 45 in its basic form is words addressed to a royal groom and bride as they prepare for a celebration of marriage. The psalm begins with the words of a poet, the composer of the psalm; moves on to praise the royal groom and the bride; and closes with the words of the poet once again.”¹⁹⁶

That the royal figure addressed in Psalm 45 is to be blessed, and is to have a significant reign, is something detectable in Psalm 45:17: “I will make remembered Your name in every generation and generation; on this account people shall thank You forever and ever.”¹⁹⁷ Some

¹⁹⁵ Toni Craven and Walter Harrelson, “The Psalms,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 790.

¹⁹⁶ deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, 417.

¹⁹⁷ Heb. *yehodukha l'olam v'ed* (יְהוֹדִיךָ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד).

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might have difficulty seeing this sort of commendation ascription made for a mortal king, but knowledge and thanksgiving issued in the future generations for one of Israel's godly monarchs, is hardly something idolatrous. Likewise, to see a human king from Ancient Israel referred to in terms in which one might naturally expect to see employed for God, is hardly irregular: "Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one [gibbor, גִּבּוֹר], in your glory and majesty!" (Psalm 45:3, RSV). And, the ascription of God anointing this royal individual, as an approving sign of good character, should be appreciated: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; rightly has God, your God, chosen to anoint you with oil of gladness over all your peers" (Psalm 45:7[8], NJPS).

While there are enough statements appearing in Psalm 45 that can apply to an entirely human or mortal individual, significant questions are undeniably raised by what appears in Psalm 45:7: *kis'akha Elohim olam v'ed* (כִּסְאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד). This is rendered by the Kohlenberger interlinear as, "throne-of-you God forever and-ever."¹⁹⁸ The biggest issue present, is that if a mortal king is being addressed in Psalm 45, is evaluating whether or not, or at least how, he has just been referred to as *Elohim* or "God." Some English Bibles confuse things, by rendering Psalm 45:7 along the lines of "Your throne is from GOD, it is forever and ever" (Keter Crown Bible), but no Hebrew preposition, such as *l'* (ל) or *min* (מִן),¹⁹⁹ precedes *Elohim* in Psalm 45:7. Another way has been to view *Elohim* as adjectival: "Your divine throne endures for ever and ever" (RSV). But ultimately, readers have to reckon with the king of Psalm 45:7 being referred to directly as *Elohim* or "God."

How have some approached the reference to the king of Psalm 45 as "God"? A frequent proposal issued is that the potential monarch of Israel or Judah being addressed as *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), is to be taken along the lines of how other Ancient Near Eastern societies ascribed divine or god-like titles to their leaders.²⁰⁰ J. Clinton McCann, Jr. details,

"[T]he poet so identifies the king with God's purposes that the psalmist even addresses the king in v. 6a as 'elohim' (אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhīm)...While other ancient Near Eastern cultures viewed the king as divine, and while Israel certainly accorded the king special relatedness to God...it is not likely that the Israelite or Judean kings were viewed as divine."²⁰¹

In an Ancient Near Eastern context, it was not irregular for monarchs and leaders to be referred to as *elohim*, or other related Semitic terms such as *el* (אֵל) or *eloah* (אֱלֹהַ). In Ancient Israel, however, would one expect a seemingly unqualified reference to its monarch as "*elohim*," knowing the association that some could make in the wider ANE world, possibly implying that he was divine or semi-divine? Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler make some important observations in the *Jewish Study Bible*:

"If this is taken literally, this psalm would be unique in the entire Bible in explicitly depicting the king as divine (see v. 4 and v. 18n.), a notion that existed at times in other ancient Near Eastern cultures but is otherwise absent in biblical thought."²⁰²

Textually speaking, while there are ascriptions in Psalm 45, which one would think should be reserved for God—i.e., "I commemorate your fame for all generations, so peoples will praise you forever and ever" (Psalm 45:17[18], NJPS; cf. 72:17²⁰³)—there can be some room for maneuverability with some statements possibly being applied to a human monarch. Psalm 45:6

¹⁹⁸ Kohlenberger, 4:395.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Arnold and Choi, pp 110-114, 116-119.

²⁰⁰ The New American Bible, for example, has "Your throne, O god, stands forever."

²⁰¹ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 862.

²⁰² Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, "Psalms," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1332.

²⁰³ "May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines; and let men bless themselves by him; let all nations call him blessed" (Psalm 72:17).

saying *kis'akha Elohim olam v'ed*, “Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever” (NRSV), leaves very little room for one to maneuver, if an entirely mortal king is the subject. In an Ancient Israelite monotheistic culture—surrounded by other Ancient Near Eastern societies where the monarchs and leaders were considered to be gods and goddesses—the monarch being referred to as “*elohim*” would be very problematic. If the author(s) of Psalm 45 intended this composition to only be directed to a mortal king, then it could have very easily said “Your throne, O king, is forever and ever,” as the title *melekh* (מֶלֶךְ) was employed in its opening verse. Ortlund correctly recognizes,

“In Psalm 45:6 the king is celebrated as enthroned forever. The eternity of his sovereign reign is the point of the verse, consistent with the grandeur of the psalm as a whole, and the historic sons of David were not deified. The uniqueness of Israel’s God was too clear to allow confusion on the matter, and the weakness of Israel’s kings were too obvious for ancient Near Eastern ideological bluff.”²⁰⁴

That a correction to any misunderstanding of *kis'akha Elohim olam v'ed* in Psalm 45:6 could have been issued later, by ancient Jewish translations of the Hebrew Tanach, would have been something natural to expect. But this is not what we see. The Greek Septuagint has the fairly literal translation, *ho thronos sou ho Theos eis ton aiōna* (ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα), “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (NETS), and does not substitute a term such as *basileus* (βασιλεύς) or “king.” The Aramaic Targum of Psalm 45:6, an expanded paraphrase, is even more specific as to who the subject is: “The throne of your glory, O LORD, lasts forever and ever; the scepter of your kingdom is an upright scepter.”²⁰⁵ Here, the terminology *YHWH Eloha* (אלהים יהוה) is actually employed, with an unambiguous usage of the Tetragrammaton to refer to the anointed figure.

Certainly, many Jewish readers of Psalm 45:6 over the centuries have wondered, from time to time, about how to approach *kis'akha Elohim olam v'ed* or “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Psalm 45:6a). This depicts some sort of *melekh* (Psalm 45:1) being referred to as *Elohim* or “God,” with it then being stated how God proper has anointed this figure: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore has God, your God [*Elohim Elohekha*, אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ], anointed you, with oil of joy from among your peers” (Psalm 45:7[8], ATS). That Psalm 45 has been read Messianically cannot be dismissed here, as Psalm 45:3 is paraphrased in the Aramaic Targums with, “Your beauty, O King Messiah, is greater than the sons of men; the spirit of prophecy has been placed on your lips; because of this the LORD has blessed you forever.”²⁰⁶ A Messianic orientation of Psalm 45 would require its words to be approached in terms of Israel in the Tanach being associated like a bride to the Lord, the wedding in view to be an analogy of the formal anointing and rule of the Messiah over His Kingdom, and the intimate union and fellowship He is to have with His own. deClaissé-Walford properly interjects how Psalm 45 should be read with the activity of Jesus the Messiah in mind:

“The words of Psalm 45, which were words addressed to a royal groom and bride, may also be understood as words addressed to the [*ekklēsia*] as the bride of Christ. The Hebrew Bible certainly provides many analogies of the relationship between God and the Israelites as that of husband and wife (see Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 16 and 23; and Isa. 62:1-5). The Christian Scriptures continue the analogy (see Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 19:7-9).”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Ortlund, “The Deity of Christ and the Old Testament,” in *The Deity of Christ*, 46.

²⁰⁵ *BibleWorks 9.0: The Psalms Targum: An English Translation*.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, pp 416-417.

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The statements of Psalm 45:6-7, depicting the Messianic King referred to directly as *Elohim* or “God,” but also being anointed by “God, Your God,” were employed by the author of Hebrews 1:8-9 to contrast the nature and status of Yeshua the Messiah, with that of the more general Heavenly host of angels:

“For to which of the angels did He {the Father} ever say...But of the Son *He says*, ‘YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS’” (Hebrews 1:5a, 8-9).

If the text of Psalm 45:6 read with a term like *melekh* or “king,” rather than *Elohim* or “God,” then we could have some sort of a Davidic or Israelite/Judahite psalm, to be applied to Israel’s Messiah, and the only issues we would have to probe would concern the nature and quality of the Messiah’s reign. But rather than *Elohim* being modified in versions such as the Greek Septuagint or Aramaic Targum, the King being a Divine figure is only confirmed. As those who affirm the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth, and the clear application of Psalm 45:6-7 to Him in Hebrews 1:8-9, we conclude that Yeshua addressed as “God” is affirming of His Divinity, although as Messianic King that He is the designated servant of the LORD God of Israel, for accomplishing His redeeming purposes for the Earth. As Ortlund puts it, “Psalm 45, if allowed to speak for itself, demands recognition as a prophecy of a divine-human Messiah and the joy of his ultimate glories with his people.”²⁰⁸

Psalm 82:1-8

“God Calls Mortal Beings ‘gods’”

“A Psalm of Asaph. God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked. They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High. Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like *any* one of the princes.’ Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is You who possesses all the nations.”

Psalm 82 is broadly condemning of various officials and magistrates within the community of Ancient Israel. In stark contrast to the fair and righteous judgment of the Lord, He chastises and rebukes the behavior of those human judges appointed to administer the law, asking them, “How long will you judge perversely, showing favor to the wicked?” (Psalm 82:2, NJPS). Cohen is correct to conclude,

“They contravened the basic rule: *Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour* (Lev. xix. 15). The scales of justice must be held evenly, without bias in favour of the poor from a feeling that the verdict against the richer party to the suit would not inconvenience him, and certainly without partiality to the man of influence from a fear of the consequences to the judge or as the result of bribery.”²⁰⁹

The solution, to the problem exclaimed, would be for these various human judges to take care of the destitute and disenfranchised (Psalm 82:3-4). One does not get the impression that the Lord anticipated the officials and magistrates enacting a change of action or ethics, witnessed by

²⁰⁸ Ortlund, “The Deity of Christ and the Old Testament,” in *The Deity of Christ*, 47.

²⁰⁹ Cohen, *Psalms*, 270.