

Psalm 45 and Bible Study

As with every Psalm that we study I hope that before you engage this Study Guide you have first spent copious amounts of time in the text, in study, in meditation, and in prayer. If not, I would encourage you to do so even at the expense of reviewing this material as you will shortcut a process that demands time and attention. You will secure a conclusion without having done the work of formulating a conclusion. With Psalm 45 I am particularly grateful that I did not rush to tools, resources, and commentators, but only gave them attention when the hard work was done because with some of these resources I argued and by others my whole understanding of the psalm was changed. However, it was a thoroughly informed change and not a whimsical or overly persuasive argument that produced the change – it was the exchanging that comes in a healthy conversation where both parties have done their work of preparation. So if you have not prepared for the conversation put this down and come back later, it will be worth it.

As I have stated, my understanding of Psalm 45 changed from the time that I completed my personal work on the text to the time that I completed my consultation of others on the text. The reasons for this will become clear as we walk through the various elements of the psalm. However, from a Bible Study perspective I want to encourage you in your own studies. I had a conclusion that was quite close to where I have landed now, but it was missing a key element which was effectively the theme of the whole psalm. When I began reading others who have done faithful work on the passage a tension was introduced as the theme that they were articulating was clear enough (that Psalm 45 was a wedding celebration), but their position had a substantial flaw that they were leaving in place (celebration of polygamy) and I was not so willing to settle with this conclusion. This introduced substantial tension: there was a consistent commitment to the context being a wedding celebration, but the context appeared polygamous and the men I was reading agreed and conceded that it was a direct violation of the command to the kings of Israel, but they were still willing to state that the Scriptures were celebrating this wedding.... Finally, I came across a few men who provided both clarity and resolution – a wedding celebration to a bride (no polygamy included). The resolution was plainly in the text and made clear with reasonable work. I hope to make these details clear as we work through Psalm 45, but include this up front to help you grow as a Bible Student and to help you understand how I am approaching Psalm 45 and why I am using Derek Kidner's outline and not my own (which I have kept for instructional purposes).

One final word about Bible Study and how this process unfolded. When I miss something in the text, when I am persuaded to refine my position, or when I am outright wrong, I want to finish with an understanding of why and how to get it right the next time. With all faithful commentators I have a common teacher (The Spirit of God) and a common text (The Scriptures), so short of a grammatical element that requires a more nuanced skill set, I know it is wholly possible to come to the best conclusion without having to rely on others who I hope will refine and polish my understanding and not outright redirect or correct it. My exhortation to you is that you do not become commentary dependent; you have the same teacher (The Spirit of God) and a common text (The Scriptures).

Psalm 45 and Marriage

Psalm 45 is different. When one noteworthy commentator begins their exposition with a statement that Psalm 45 is unique among all the Psalms it gets your attention, but when two state this it most certainly should direct you to the particular psalm's placement in the Psalter and the Scriptures as a whole.

Psalm 45 is a psalm that is esteeming the King of Israel, and specifically it is doing so in the context of his magnificent wedding celebration to his bride and queen. It is an extraordinary expression of the glory of God's steward and his

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

celebrated royal wedding. Therefore, Psalm 45 is making so very much of both the king and the institution of marriage and we would do well to have this text inform our thoughts, prayer, and worship.

I am aware that we are studying an Old Testament text addressing the wedding of a king of a Theocratic Kingdom, but it shines in its context even if we do not immediately enter the same world ourselves, and its truths endure and speak to us, the New Covenant Saints and Church. I also understand that while not all in the Church will marry, all are to be marriage's champion as it is God's most precious natural institution for man and is of special consequence to his Church, his bride. Further, I can assure you that all under my care seeking to enter covenant marriage will be pressed to study and delight in Psalm 45 – it has shaped my thinking, my praying, and my worship.

Outlines

David Crowe

45:1	Introduction – An Esteeming Discourse to the King
45:2-5	The Magnificence of the King
42:2	Externally Attractive and Internally Graced
42:3-5	The Triumphant Warrior
45:6-7	The Righteous Rule of the King
42:6	The Source of the King's Authority and Blessing
42:6-7	An Upright Ruler with Proper Affections
45:7-9	The Blessings of the King
45:7	Anointed with Gladness
45:8	Royal Garments and Music
45:9	Royal Ladies
45:10-11	A Charge to the Daughters
45:10	Hear, Consider, Incline: Forget and Embrace
45:11	Pay Homage to the King
45:12	Esteemed from Without (by Tyre)
45:13-15	The Blessing of the Princesses
45:13-14	The Princess' Royal Attire
45:14-15	The Princess' Royal Escort
45:16-17	The Blessing of the Princes
45:16	The Princes Continuing the Royal Line
45:17	An Enduring Line and National Praise

English Standard Version Study Bible²

45:1	A Song for a King.
45:2-9	You Are a King of Beauty, Majesty, and Justice.
45:10-12	O Bride, Honor This King.
45:13-15	The Bride's Procession.
45:16-17	O King, Your Line Will Continue in Your Sons.

² English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.993-994

John MacArthur³

I. Poetic Preface (45:1)

II. Song of Celebration (45:2-16)

A. The King-Groom (45:2-9)

1. Endowments of the king-groom (45:2)
2. Exploits of the king-groom (45:3-5)
3. Elevation of the king-groom (45:6,7)
4. Eminence of the king-groom (45:8,9)

B. The Princess-Bride (45:10-15)

1. A challenge to the princess-bride (45:10-12)
2. The procession of the princess-bride (45:13-15)

C. Future Children from This Union (45:16)

III. Poetic Postscript (45:17)

Arnold Rhodes⁴

45:1-9 Address to the King

45:10-13a Counsel to the New Queen

45:13b-15 The Bride and Her Attendants

45:16-17 A Look to the Future

Willem VanGemen⁵

A Introduction (vv.1)

B Address to the King (vv.2-5)

C The Glory of the Bridegroom (vv.6-9)

B' Address to the Bride (vv.10-12)

C' The Glory of the Bride (vv.13-15)

A' Conclusion (vv.16-17)

James Boice⁶

45:1 Introduction / God's Poet Laureate

45:2-9 An Address to the Groom / In Praise of King Jesus

45:10-15 An Address to the Bride / Comfort for the King's Bride

45:16-17 Conclusion / "Yes I Am Coming Soon"

As demonstrated by this outline The Covenantal Commentators "replacement theology" comes through particularly strongly with Psalm 45 – I find their work most useful when they speak directly to the immediate context. I will not directly engage their supplemental interpretive conclusions as I do not see it helpful for the purpose of this Study Guide. It is sufficient to say that I only include the language of this outline to be charitably respectful and to provide a diversity of overviews not because I endorse it.

³ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.782

⁴ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pgs.78-79

⁵ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg.396

⁶ An Expository Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pgs.381-386

Steven Lawson⁷

45:1	The Rejoicing Psalmist
45:2-9	The Royal Groom
45:10-12	The Radiant Bride
45:13-15	The Regal Procession
45:16-17	The Reigning Offspring

Derek Kidner⁸

45:1	Prologue: Verses for a king
45:2-5	Kingly stature
45:6-9	Kingly state
45:10-12	The bride's allegiance
45:13-15	The bridal train
45:16-17	Sons for the throne

As stated, I will be using Derek Kidner's outline for this Study Guide.

General Structure and Context

By way of general context.

While I have consistently attempted to champion the position that you must first let the original text speak before you explore its later and often fuller/greater application in other passages, particularly the New Testament, it is encouraging to see this same charge by a commentator when addressing a given psalm that has New Testament application.

Willem VanGemenen stated the following in his introductory material on Psalm 45: "In a special way the psalm also applies to Jesus, who rules as the Son of David (cf. Heb. 1:8). But expositors must first listen to the psalm in the context of Israel and refrain from reading only the relationship of Christ and the church into this text. In this manner, they can appreciate more the blessedness of the rule of the One born of a woman into the lineage of David – Jesus our Messiah."⁹

By way of structural context.

Along with all respectable commentators that I have read John MacArthur understands that the backdrop for Psalm 45 was a royal wedding. With this in view he concludes that Psalm 45 has a three-part song of celebration.¹⁰ This conclusion was reflected in his outline that is included above and its three parts are as follows:

- 1) The King-Groom (45:2-9)
- 2) The Princess-Bride (45:10-15)
- 3) Future Children from This Union (45:16)

James Boice has a similar structure, but breaks it down just a little more and for reasons of cultural context that proved helpful in seeing the flow of the theme of the psalm.

⁷ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 1-75, Volume 2. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2003 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs.239-240

⁸ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 1-72. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 1973. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs.188-191

⁹ VanGemenen, Pg.396

¹⁰ MacArthur, Pg.782

Boice states that the marital custom of the Hebrews included a wedding celebration that began first with a promised betrothal that carried substantial weight and functionally identified the couple as husband and wife before their formal covenant union. He then explains that the day of the actual covenant union would begin with the groom's family and company congregating at his home and the bride's family and company gathering at her home while she prepared herself in the most ornate and magnificent ways possible. The groom and his company would then have a grand procession to the bride's home where she and her company would be retrieved and a second procession would lead the whole/combined company back to the groom's home. At this time there would be a celebratory feast ranging in length depending on the status and wealth of the persons involved.¹¹ It is this pattern that Boice states is being demonstrated by the very flow and structure of Psalm 45 where the king and queen's wedding is being celebrated and recorded for posterity.

Boice provides the following breakdown:¹²

45:2-9 The king is coming for his bride.

45:10-12 The bride is being given advice while she awaits her groom.

45:13-15 The bride is led to the king and ultimately to his palace.

45:16-17 The poet's personal blessing on the marriage and its union.

Header

From Psalm 45's header we can conclude the following: the psalm was provided to the Choirmaster, that there was an identification of some sort with the term "lilies," that the psalm is a Maskil of the Sons of Korah, and that it is a love song.

"According to Lilies"

Lilies: When examining various texts, the term appears to be used as expected, of a flower, but its perhaps more technical reference in the psalms is less clear – maybe a technical, stylistic, or grammatical term. Keil & Delitzsch state that it was possibly a tune associated with another song and applied to this psalm.¹³ Similarly, MacArthur states that the "Lilies" reference is likely to a tune used for the song and that "The Love Song" element lends itself to this being a wedding song, specifically a royal wedding song.¹⁴

"A Love Song"

Love Song: An affectionate song for one cared for in a variety of contexts. Examining the general context, it clearly appears to be an affectionate love and not just a faithful love of daily commitment.

Steven Lawson states that the heading informs us that among other things Psalm 45 is, "...intended to teach wisdom about the holy virtue of marriage."¹⁵

45:1 Prologue: Verses for a king

The psalmist immediately betrays his unrestrained enthusiasm for having the high privilege of sharing with others the pleasing theme or good word of the magnificent king's praiseworthiness and his glorious wedding to his beautiful bride the queen. He is not enthusiastic that he is sharing 'breaking news' but news that will make the hearts of the people glad, news that mingles both national and theological pride, news that is grander than what the moment can properly express and in this his heart has exceeded its capacity to contain it! The psalmist is expressing a rich joy that is bursting from the center of his being and demands the audience of the nation of Israel, the nations that surround, and all of their posterity.

¹¹ Boice, Pgs.381-382

¹² Boice, Pg.382

¹³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.327

¹⁴ MacArthur, Pg.782

¹⁵ Lawson, Pg.238

Keil & Delitzsch properly state, “Whatever the heart is full of, with that the mouth overflows; the heart of the poet gushes over with a ‘good word.’”¹⁶ Continuing this thought with the psalmist it is stated that this most magnificent and consuming thought that demands to be declared is a proper consideration and treatment of the king.¹⁷

So here we observe that the psalmist states that he is addressing his verses to the king, to the sovereign, to the ruler, to the chief of the region, the chief of the land, the chief of the kingdom. This is the King of Israel to whom others must submit and obey.

Note that on account of the psalm’s explicit statement that it is being addressed to the king, I began formulating my original understanding of the psalm. This was not an erroneous move, but one that kept pressing me to try and understand in what way it was addressed to the king. In later portions of the psalm I was a little too resistant to initially value that the bride was receiving so much direct attention for no other reason than the psalm states that it was explicitly addressed to the king. It is clear now that the whole of the psalm is addressed to the king, but this does not require that the full scope of details be about the king though the relationships are clearly ones in which he is engaged.

Finally, in this “prologue” the enthusiastic psalmist states that his tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. He has postured himself to make these wonderful truths known. Keil & Delitzsch further clarify that the pen of a ready scribe is not simply articulating one who can record these wonderful things quickly, but with skill and style.¹⁸ Such were the merits of both the context and content.

The King’s King

The term for “King” used here is found in the Old Testament over 2,500 times, but only 63 times in the Psalms (less than 3% of its usage) therefore, when it is present I think it merits attention as Israel was a Theocratic Kingdom and it was The LORD’s plan to use a King. I have notated its general use in each of the eight psalms where it is used three or more times. It is clear in these contexts that while there are kings, it is The LORD who is King. This is especially potent in our passage where the term is used more than in any other Psalm, and while it is extolling the natural king there is a clear parenthetical pause to identify the source of the king’s authority and right to rule – The King of Glory, God whose throne is forever and ever (45:6).

2: 3x The clear centerpiece and focus of Psalm 2 is The LORD’s King.

5: 1x

10: 1x

18: 1x

20: 1x

21: 2x

24: 4x The King of Glory!

29: 1x

33: 1x

44: 1x

45: 7x The natural king whose authority is wholly rooted in the anointing of the God whose throne is forever and ever.

47: 3x God is the king of all the earth.

48: 2x

61: 1x

63: 1x

68: 4x God, The King of kings.

72: 3x The king petitions God for blessing/help.

74: 1x

76: 1x

84: 1x

89: 2x

95: 1x

98: 1x

99: 1x

102: 1x

105: 3x The LORD’s sovereign dealings with kings.

110: 1x

119: 1x

135: 2x

136: 4x Extolling the covenant love of God that overthrows kings for his people.

138: 1x

144: 1x

145: 1x

148: 1x

149: 2x

¹⁶ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.327

¹⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, Pgs.327-328

¹⁸ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.328

45:2-5 Kingly stature

Qualities from Inside and Out

When addressing the king's stature, the psalmist immediately praises his exceptionally handsome appearance and states that it is a superior handsomeness among men. However, he quickly advances his praise of the king from the external to his inner man as reflected by the king's speech which is as one who has had grace poured upon their lips. Speech being a reflection of the heart and the lips being seen as a medium for the expression of speech. The king's speech is as though it was poured over with grace. The king is effectively being identified as a man of regard both externally by his appearance and internally by his speech.

We then have a mildly challenging bridge with "therefore" which would almost appear to direct us to the reason for the stated blessing that would follow, but contextually we understand that these are the benefits and not the cause of blessing. Interestingly though, many commentators appeared to put a peculiar emphasis on the external expectation of the king (in contrast to God who examines the heart), but Keil & Delitzsch more properly captured the sentiment of the psalm by affirming that it was not that the king was magnificent and praiseworthy in his own right, but by the kind blessing of God, "...beauty itself is a blessing, not a ground for blessing."¹⁹

So here we have that the king is blessed by God or that he has enjoyed kind favor by the giver of all good things. The king has been blessed or received kind favor from God to be an outstanding man attractive in appearance and speech and this was continued disposition with no end in view.

Here is another reason that I could not initially accept the sweeping theme of marriage for this psalm, because as we shall soon see, it almost appeared to be a polygamous context if it was a context of marriage and this would not be consistent with God's overt blessing (celebrating overt disobedience).

The Righteous Warrior

The psalmist next affirms his king as a warrior. He takes on the tool for combat as one who is prepared to engage the enemy for reasons even greater than himself or his people and he does this in his splendor and majesty. These terms, splendor and majesty, may appear too lofty even for a faithful king, but Willem VanGemeran argues, "The phrase 'splendor and majesty' speaks of his past victories and the confident expectation of additional victories every time he marches as the head of his troops."²⁰ He has been and continued to be a victorious king.

The king is then called upon to ride out victoriously. The language here was a warrior being summoned to battle and the warrior king is described as a mighty man of battle, not unlike his predecessor and father David, who along with his soldiers were described as having a rage in battle like a bear robbed of her cubs. This king is handsome, graced in his speech, and mighty in battle with splendor and majesty (elements rooted in God and provided by him to those whom he so chooses to so esteem).

We then see that the king goes to battle not simply for the welfare of the nation or even himself personally, but for: "the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness," expectations that would be present for the king who would be God's man as king.

Perhaps here a tension might be felt between combat and meekness, but when framed in a context of truth and righteousness a furious combatant can be both zealous for The LORD and humbled in heart before him. Further, it is clear how the king would contest for righteousness as God's man he would fight for that which is right before God and in submissive compliance with his good law.

¹⁹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.328

²⁰ VanGemeran, Pg.398

Again, we see here the image of the king riding out as a conquering warrior, valiant and sure in battle. However, it is not simply for the advancement of a personal fiefdom or even out of personal principle, but for the causes of The King: truth, meekness, and righteousness. Much today is discussed about “just wars” – this king rode for truth, meekness, and righteousness as God’s steward and as such is esteemed.

This king also rode victoriously or prosperously. Note the charge given to General Joshua as he is at the precipice of militarily conquering the promised land – it was rooted in submission to God’s truth.

“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.’” Joshua 1:1-9

This same truth is also articulated in one of the very cornerstones of the Psalms, Psalm 1.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Psalm 1

God’s man, God’s king, is victorious and prospers because he submits himself to God and his truth. This is not just a king strutting out to battle with a superior military, but a king confidently riding out to battle because he has a superior God.

The king rides for the cause of truth/faithfulness, for meekness/gentleness, and righteousness.

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:6-8

Let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!” or “...let your right hand teach you fear!”

Sharp arrows

Sharp arrows or effective arrows for disposing of an enemy, a consequential tool of battle and an arrow piercing the heart provides a finality to the battle and/or an enemy. “And Jehu drew his bow with full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot.” 2 Kings 9:24

The aforementioned elements that the king fights for are clearly substantial enough to require severe language as they are not artificial ideals or some generic elements, but elements requiring real action and even action to the severest extent if necessary. Sharp arrows therefore appear to be an image of lethal severity and a poetically beautiful one at that. From a girded sword, to riding into battle, to effectively sharp arrows... the king will be victorious.

The peoples fall under you.

These are the king's enemies because of their opposition to truth, meekness, and righteousness. This is not simply a political or ideological opponent, but an opponent to the things of God and his anointed man. The peoples fall under the king as he is absolute in his victory, his opposition will not stand.

"The poet lists some of the expectations as excellences. The royal perfections pertain to his judicial, administrative, executive, and military duties. The king's 'excellence' lies in God's presence with him. It is God's divine blessing manifested in his speech, royal valor, concern for establishing God's kingdom on earth, and the continuity of his dynasty."²¹

I wholly concur with VanGemeran when he states that the King of Israel, the Davidic King, is the "vassal of the Great King"²² and that his success, affirmations, and commendations are rooted in his own covenant faithfulness. "The kingdom of the son of David is a temporal and special expression of the kingdom of God on earth."²³

Regarding this magnificent description of the king Derek Kidner states that this is not hyperbole or flattery as identified in its chief application of Jesus, "This king is no figurehead but the embodiment of all that gives kingship its unique glory: its claim to combine immemorial continuity (2c, 6a) and compelling personal glory (2ff.) in one man."²⁴ I agree and would state that as is frequently the case with Messianic references there is the lesser and greater application. The lesser application being to the immediate king who to various degrees exemplifies these ideals when at his best as he is directing us to the greater king and the greater application.

45:6-9 Kingly state

Your throne, O God

I think it is a completely reasonable question to ask how does this direct reference to God fit into the psalm and its immediate flow?

God is referenced as King here in a context of extolling the king... this appears to be the tie in to the passage: affirming that the king finds his identity and right standing as the righteous King's agent.

Note also that in a context of extolling the king, he is noted to be God's man and more specifically God's special agent - he is the anointed man to lead the witness bearing nation and it is in his fulfilling and faithfully executing that role that he is most highly esteemed.

What makes this verse challenging is that 45:1 explicitly stated that the psalm is addressed to the king and it is clearly crafted that way before, after, and even in this same verse. But again the connection appears clear. Every affirmation and praiseworthy element of the king, all his good fortune, all his pomp and blessing are wholly rooted in the Eternal King and his kind blessing, that the temporal king might serve as a tool to direct from the lesser glory to the greater. The temporal king is the lesser light of the night, the chief reflector in the darkened sky, always reminding us of the greater light that rules both night and day. The king in his glory directs our attention to the King of Glory who has and will rule forever and ever.

As do others, Kidner sees the tension that 45:6 presents, with the reference to God and his throne, and that Hebrews 1 fully unpacks and states that it all but demands a greater resolution than the immediate context expresses. "This paradox is consistent with the incarnation, but mystifying in any other context. It is an example of Old Testament language bursting

²¹ VanGemeran, Pg.398 Note that there were four parenthetical breaks in the original text that I did not include for smoother reading and to more clearly communicate the general argument. See original text for these details.

²² VanGemeran, Pg.398

²³ VanGemeran, Pg.398

²⁴ Kidner, Pg.188

its banks, to demand a more than human fulfilment (as did Ps. 110:1, according to our Lord).²⁵ I agree and as a New Covenant believer I see the clear tension here, but I would slow down a little to first appreciate Psalm 45 on its own merits. I want to let its lesser glory shine first and then enjoy the fuller glory to which it points.

Further, the throne of God endures forever, the seat, symbol, and truth of his absolute and perfectly sovereign rule over all kings and all persons and all creation is both complete and sure. What has no beginning also has no end. The eternal God has and will forever rule and it is because of this foundational truth that any legitimate king and any man anointed to rule by God has his authority. It is because of the forever and ever throne of God that David could be promised in 2 Samuel 7:11-17

“And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.”

Ultimately these two truths (the authority from which the king draws his own and the enduring throne of David) would be fully satisfied in David’s greater son as stated in Hebrews 1:8-9 when addressing the superiority of Jesus, “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the 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 gladness beyond your companions.’”

Sidebar – Translation Insight

VanGemenen addresses the complexity and challenge that the beginning of 45:6 introduces into the text, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” It is not just a theological or textual flow challenge, but a grammatical challenge too and the outcome influences a proper interpretation. He works through the various deductions that translators have come to and is persuaded that the best conclusion would be, “your throne [is a throne of] God.”²⁶ VanGemenen goes on to explain, “Kingship in Israel was a derived, not a divine, kingship; therefore, the further definition of ‘forever and ever’ qualifies the kingship of David’s dynasty as by divine grant.”²⁷

This translation does not functionally change the deductions articulated in this Study Guide as the passage is clearly pointing to the source and authority of the king’s rule, but inasmuch as it is a valid and possibly better translation it deserved our attention and consideration.

Psalms Sidebar: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”

Psalm 9:7-8	“But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.”
Psalm 10:16	“The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his hand.”
Psalm 11:4	“The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids tests the children of man.”
Psalm 29:10	“The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.”
Psalm 47:8	“God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.”
Psalm 93:2	“Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.”
Psalm 102:12	“But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations.”
Psalm 103:19	“The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”

²⁵ Kidner, Pg.189

²⁶ VanGemenen, Pg.400 Brackets in original.

²⁷ VanGemenen, Pg.400

Psalms 145:13 “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.”

Psalms 146:10 “The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!”

The Scepter of Your Kingdom

This kingdom is marked or equated with uprightness and by a king who loves righteousness 45:7.

Explaining the symbol and role of the scepter VanGemen states, “The ‘scepter of justice’ was a royal symbol of his authority to establish a rule of integrity based on the laws of God rather than on the whims or dictates of the king.”²⁸

Loved Righteousness/Hated Wickedness

The king is identified as ruling with equity, with uprightness, a natural fruit of his having loved righteousness and hating wickedness.

It is clear that the king’s heart, his affections, his commitment, his love has been for righteousness – that which is right, just, and pleasing to his King. In turn the king has no affection, but disdain and opposition toward that which is not just and that which displeases his King, that which is wicked. “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.” Psalm 5:4

God has anointed with gladness

The king has been anointed by God for his service as king, but here the psalmist goes on to state that the king has been anointed/set apart with gladness too! This beyond even that which his companions enjoy.

John Calvin argues for a proper order regarding the cause/effect of this anointing and its associated fruits, “When the Psalmist adds, that the king was *anointed above his fellows*, this is not to be understood as the effect or fruit of his righteousness, but rather as the cause of it: for the love of uprightness and equity by which [the king] was actuated arose from the fact, that he was divinely appointed to the kingdom.”²⁹ He later finishes with, “From this it follows, that anointing in respect of order preceded righteousness, and that, therefore, righteousness cannot be accounted the cause of the anointing.”³⁰

Royal Benefits

The robes, ivory palaces, and music appear reflective of a fortunate/blessed condition. Robes, royal garments, royal clothing. Myrrh, aloes, and cassia were used as perfuming elements. Ivory palaces were especially unique and ornate royal residences from which the king enjoys music from stringed instruments. Effectively a pompous context that would be unfitting for any, but the king. These things further demonstrate that it is good to be the king, but it is especially good when the king is God’s man.

We also see that daughters of kings are among the king’s ladies of honor or his precious ladies, but chief among their company is the king’s bride, the queen. His bride/queen is identified as standing at the place of honor at his right side and is made ornate with the gold of Ophir which was a particularly precious or fine gold – an element of particular value or esteem for the queen.

This appears to be the first element of the wedding celebration, the king in his residence with all his magnificent elements and persons to enjoy along with his company that celebrates with him.

²⁸ VanGemen, Pg.399 Additional parenthetical details available.

²⁹ John Calvin; Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume 5 – Joshua-Psalms 36-92. Baker Books, 2003. (Hereafter: Calvin), Pg.179 Italics in original. I bracketed in “the king” in place of Calvin’s overt reference to Solomon to avoid confusion regarding his position and what I believe to be an argument/position that cannot be sustained by the immediate context.

³⁰ Calvin, Pg.179

The Bride/Queen – Tension Explained and Resolved

As I stated, my understanding of Psalm 45 was clarified after wrestling through various elements of the text and receiving some help from other faithful men. The single most consequential element to this process was understanding that the queen of 45:9 is synonymous with the bride addressed in the rest of the psalm. The following passages and interactions with various men's conclusions will walk you through this tension and then the resolution of the apparent tension. As I have argued before, you can shortcut this process, but it will be to your loss. There is an advantage to wrestling with the details and elements of the text.

The foundational passage: Deuteronomy 17:14-20

"When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. 'And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.'"

John MacArthur came to the conclusion that the psalm is a wedding celebration. Accordingly, I was curious as to how he would handle the highly esteemed queen (45:9) if this is a psalm about the king securing more wives. MacArthur states, "This court picture could refer to royal female guests, but also includes the other wives and concubines of the king-groom (cf. the situation with Solomon in 1 Kin. 11:1). Such polygamy of course was prohibited by God's Word; unfortunately, it was still common among the kings of Israel."³¹

What I find perplexing about this conclusion is that while historical realities are documented and often without a critique or evaluation, such as the kings having multiple wives, they are still not endorsed. Psalm 45 however is a celebratory endorsement and it would not appear consistent for Scripture to both admonish and celebrate the same matter. It would be consistent to simply remain silent on the matter and endorse, embrace, and celebrate that which is good. Further, when we take another example such as Moses' passive allowance and prescriptions for divorce because of Israel's hardness of heart it is structured with controls, but not celebration or endorsement.

John Calvin comes to a like conclusion as MacArthur and also acknowledges the explicit violation of the Law of God for the King of Israel in multiplying wives. However, he offers an unsatisfying resolution to his conclusion that Psalm 45 is both celebrating the king and his marriage and that the affair is prohibited by God.³² Again, I do not see that this is an acceptable resolution and am persuaded that the whole of the context be more closely reexamined.

Also holding to the wedding ceremony position, Arnold Rhodes, states that the queen in 45:9 is a young queen, presumably the bride, whom he marries.³³ This appears forced if we are going to be consistent in this understanding and flow of the psalm. Further, if this is not the prospective bride then is it not strange to (rightfully) state that the queen here was at a position of honor at the king's right side.³⁴ A peculiar honor given the context of multiplying brides. However, if this queen is also the referenced princess then the psalm is jumping around and making title changes that do not appear necessary. *You can see here that I am still resisting the very position I would soon embrace. The argument was not especially strong and modifying a conclusion is of no small consequence – further clarification and strength of argument was necessary.*

³¹ MacArthur, Pg.783

³² Calvin, Pgs.185-186

³³ Rhodes, Pg.79

³⁴ Rhodes, Pg.79

VanGemeran highlights the elements described in the psalm: robes, spices, music, royal daughters, and royal bride as celebratory elements of a royal wedding and the blessing of God on this son of David.³⁵ He also takes the unique conclusion that what was most consistently translated as “queen” in 45:9 he translated as “bride.”³⁶ Therefore he can maintain a greater consistency when he concludes his commentary on 45:6-9 by stating, “To secure the effects of his blessing on the people, the king should embody the theocratic ideals: wisdom, valor, and royal attributes.”³⁷ I wholly concur with his conclusion, but I am curious as to this precise detail change to maintain greater consistency so that we do not have the tension of a polygamous wedding celebration in view of the Law of God that the king was to model, know, and love. This kind of slight aberration in word choice is not wholly without merit and it could be an established conclusion that this bride was indeed the queen-elect. Perhaps this resolves the otherwise inexplicable and overlooked tension present with others.

Though I cannot encourage one to consult Keil & Delitzsch’s work on Psalm 45 without extreme qualification I found their treatment of the queen in a context that he also sees as a marriage context helpful. Like VanGemeran the queen is also understood to be the bride, “...it is evident that her relationship to the king is at this time just in the act of being completed.”³⁸ *Effectively it is pre-consummated application of the title she would soon enjoy.*

Kidner is also in the company of those who understand the queen in 45:9 to be the bride of the subsequent verses.³⁹ There does not need to be an artificial tension or an attempt to excuse the praising of that which is not praiseworthy. Indeed, this is a praiseworthy event! *Tension resolved – the matter fundamentally came down to a clearer understanding of the word choice of “queen” in 45:9.*

Sidebar on Immediate/Historical Context

Not to be overly pedantic, but I want to take advantage of an opportunity to illustrate a point that I consistently labor at in the Psalms regarding the responsibility to see the immediate context first. The reference to the ivory palaces was likely a reference to ivory inlays that provided striking and ornate elements to magnificent palaces. Today this would be all but repulsive to most people as the ivory trade has been shamed and there have been substantial efforts to destroy ivory pieces and ornamentation so as to completely do away with their inherent shame. This is a very contemporary disposition regarding ivory. It would be wrong to look back at Psalm 45 and like passages and regard this magnificent decorum as vulgar or wrong. Today the context is different, but we let the passage speak in its immediate context. This should also apply to a passage’s place in Redemptive History, let it speak in its immediate context first.

45:10-12 The bride’s allegiance

Hear, Consider, and Incline Your Ear

Here marks another significant change in the psalm. Whereas the psalm is fundamentally addressed to the king here we are provided insight into a conversation with the bride. A special charge to her as she awaits the arrival of her groom and king.

The consequence of the counsel that she is given is clear from the three-part overlap in charge to her to hear, consider, and incline her ear. This was not silly banter, but counsel that will serve her well as she prepares for covenant marriage to the king.

³⁵ VanGemeran. Pg.399

³⁶ VanGemeran, Pg.399

³⁷ VanGemeran, Pg.399

³⁸ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.332

³⁹ Kidner, Pg.190

There is a clear call for her to listen and give attention to what the psalmist has to say regarding putting herself in good standing with the king, that he might desire her beauty, as this is clearly advantageous to her. It is worth forgetting her people and her father's house and respecting her king, mindful that this is not just a singular husband and wife relationship. She is to give him proper homage as he is God's anointed steward and her lord.

VanGemerén, having concluded that the bride/queen is of foreign descent (forget your people and father's house) states that she is being called to heed the wisdom and faithfulness demonstrated by Ruth, who herself was a foreigner wholly assimilated to the people of God.

"For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."
Ruth 1:16

Keil & Delitzsch, again, taking a like position with VanGemerén states that here the bride is being charged in conjunction with nuptial covenant. "She is to forget her people and her father's house, to sever her natural, inherited, and customary relationships of life, both as regards outward form and inward affections; and should the king desire her beauty, to which he has a right, -- for he, as being her husband (1 Pet. 3:6), and more especially as being king, is her lord,--she is to show towards him her profoundest, reverent devotion."⁴⁰

Gifting from Tyre

For thematic clarity the ESV translated the word that is consistently daughter(s) throughout the Old Testament and so translated within Psalm 45 three other times (daughters of kings, daughter, and princess), as "the people of Tyre." I understand the rationale to capture likely intent, but I am content to be consistent within the psalm to translate this "daughters of Tyre."

This being said the matter at hand is that there are immediate and tangible advantages and blessings with heeding the aforementioned counsel. Forsake your prior family/national associations and embrace the blessings of your new association with the King of Israel.

Now as to why the specific reference to Tyre. Tyre provided much of the supplies to David and Solomon for their building projects, notably the Temple. The city is also highly regarded in Isaiah (albeit in a context of judgment), "Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth." Isaiah 23:8-9

45:13-15 The bridal train

The Princess in Her Chamber

The bride awaits her groom and she has adorned herself with maximum personal glory. She, like her groom, is adorned in royal robes, but whereas his were noted for their perfumed condition hers are interwoven with fine gold and embroidered with many colors. She is also accompanied by an entourage as she anticipates being escorted to her groom/king's palace for the final element of their matrimony.

VanGemerén states, that the scene has shifted from the throne room with groom and bride together to the bridal chamber as she prepares and approaches her king and groom.⁴¹

From Chamber to Palace

The bride and her entourage of maidens are coming to the king's presence with great joy and gladness. They are a fortunate/blessed company.

⁴⁰ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.333

⁴¹ VanGemerén, Pg.402

It would do well to recall at this time that the very psalm is identified as “a love song” and it is a kind gift that of all peoples who enjoy the rights and privileges of marriage it is the people of God walking in obedience who can taste the full sweetness of such a love story. This is God’s man who has walked in obedience and experienced numerous blessings now enjoying one of life’s finest blessings.

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.” Proverbs 18:22

Kidner states: “This escorting of the bride, led to the king in her finest attire while he awaits her in full state, is no superfluous formality: it is the acted equivalent of Paul’s phrase ‘to present you as a pure bride to her one husband’ (2 Cor. 11:2), and brings out the emphasis of the first wedding, in which God ‘brought’ the woman to the man, and of the last, in which the church comes ‘prepared’ as a bride ‘adorned’ for her husband. To do away with these elements of a marriage is to trivialize it, playing down the honour due between bridegroom and bride, and the place they both occupy in a wider circle.”⁴²

45:16-17 Sons for the throne

The psalmist offers a blessing to the groom/king that as The LORD has promised him as he walks in covenant obedience, loving righteousness and hating wickedness, so he could anticipate the blessing of a strong and faithful posterity. Sons who assume the places of their fathers as princes in all the earth.

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:16

The king’s good name and posterity and rule continues through his sons and the nations will respond with praise/thanksgiving forever with no view to an end.

The Greater Son, Jesus

The king is clearly a man who is exceptionally blessed and enjoys both good fortune and favor both in his own person and through his family. However, this extraordinary fortune is wholly rooted in the King Eternal of whom this king and all who follow are but image bearers – a natural point of reference to the supernatural and infinitely glorious. We also see through the lens of the letter to the Hebrews that the king’s chief blessing and greater Son for whom the nations will truly offer their unrestrained and unending praise is both his Son and his God.

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’ Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?’ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’ Of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.’ But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the 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 gladness beyond your companions.’ And, ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.’” Hebrews 1:1-12

⁴² Kidner, Pg.191

Conclusion

At the beginning of the Study Guide I highlighted VanGemerens charge to let the psalm speak first and let it be understood in its own right first so that when this is accomplished we better understand both it and its fuller application. I found his treatment and explanation of the text to have done just this so it is most fitting that I provide his proper and now properly appreciated conclusion as to Psalm 45's fuller application. "The psalm has implicit messianic significance. Jesus the Messiah is of the lineage of David. He fulfills the theocratic ideals in his present rule and in his glorious return. The promise of remembrance, perpetuity, and honor given to the Davidic king is particularly applicable to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. All nations will submit themselves to him (1 Co 15:24-26; Heb 10:12-13)."⁴³

⁴³ VanGemerens, Pg.403