

A MULTIPLEX APPROACH TO PSALM 45

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A balanced use of grammar, literary analysis, history, and theology used to analyze Psalm 45 reveals that the psalm is a Liebeslied. The psalm is found to be one of the Royal Psalms, although the precise Sitz im Leben cannot be determined. The structure of the psalm follows an Ab / B pattern, the first part speaking of the King and the second part of the Queen. While the psalm has reference to any king in the Davidic line, its full application is found in Christ and his bride, the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

PSALM 45 is a unique psalm. The ancient heading attached to the psalm informs the reader that it is a שִׁיר יְדִידָתָא, "a song of (tender) love," or perhaps, as Delitzsch insists, "a song of holy love."¹ One might think that such a psalm would be easy to understand. However, perhaps due to the intimacy of the subject matter, both the historical setting and, at several points, the understanding of the text itself have puzzled scholars of all ages. As Craigie laments, "Both the analysis of the Psalm and its translation. . . are subject to some uncertainty."²

Methodologically, this study follows what might be termed contextual exegesis—a procedure that makes full and balanced use of grammar, literary analysis, history, and theology. This multiplex approach is directed not only to the proper understanding of the canonical context, but also to a valid application to the contemporary context of the modern reader or hearer. An arduous, yet not unpleasant task, the method has much in common with what Walter Kaiser, Jr.

¹ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 2:77-78.

² P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1983) 337.

calls "syntactical-theological exegesis,"³ or with what E. Smick, following Oehler, terms "the historico-genetic method of Old Testament theology."⁴ In a similar vein, see the work of D. Stuart.⁵

THE SETTING OF THE PSALM

Literary Style

Psalm 45 is rich in literary features. Expositors generally concede that this ancient *Liebeslied* or love poem is a wedding song. Unlike the typical classical *epithalmium*, however, no ante-chamber chorus is utilized here, its place being assumed by the lyricist himself. In addition, if certain elements of the translation suggested below are correct, part of the psalm may be viewed as a sort of literary blazon, praising the weaponry wherewith the king is attired almost as if it were a coat of arms

Above all, of course, the psalm is a lyric poem. As such, it bears marks typical of such pieces, such as (1) a desire to reach an audience (vv 2-5, 11-14), (2) a willingness to be overheard (vv 6-7), and (3) a basic commonness or simplicity of construction.⁶ The latter point seems to be at odds with the previous observation that parts of the texts are difficult to interpret. However, it is no doubt only the modern reader who has difficulties, not the original hearers. In any case, the difficulties are confined to just a few lines.

Overall, the psalm exhibits the normal elements of Hebrew poetic expression. Thus, it contains the usual features of stock pairs (e.g., *שמעו ושמעו* 'listen and incline your ear', v II [cf. the frequent negative use of this pair in Jeremiah]; and *שמחת וגיל* / 'joy and gladness', v 16),⁷ familiar themes (e.g., truth and justice, v 5 [cf. Pss 10:14-18; 82:3-4; 146:9]; righteousness and the king[dom], v 7 [cf. 2 Sam 23:3-5; Pss 72; 85:11-14]; and righteousness versus iniquity, v 8 [cf. Ps 7:7-11; Gen 18:25; Prov 12:26, 28]), and well-known motifs such as the king as defender of the poor (v 5; cf. Pss 10: 14-18; 82:3-4; 146:8),⁸ the right hand as the emphatic designation of honor, vigor,

³ Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 89.

⁴ E. Smick, "Old Testament Theology: The Historico-Genetic Method," *JETS* 26 (1983) 145-55.

⁵ D. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980.) !

⁶ See the full discussion of C. M. Ing, "Lyric," *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of Literature*, ed. S. H. Steinberg (London: Cassell, 1953) 1:354-60. The versification for the Psalms in this article follows that of the Hebrew Bible.

⁷ See M. Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," *RSP*, I, 354.

⁸ See further R. Patterson, "The Widow, The Orphan and The Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-biblical Literature," *BSac* 224 (1973) 223-34; cf. Antoon Schoors, "Literary Phrases," *RSP*, 1, 59-62.

TABLE I
Schematic Outline of Psalm 45

Portion	Subject Matter	Verses	Progression Type
A	(Poetic Introduction)	2	
	Praise of the King	3-10	
	His Person	3-6	Descriptive
	His Position	7-10	Expository (7-8) Descriptive (9-10)
(N.B.)	"Daughter"	10	
B	(Poetic Introduction)	11-13	
	Praise of the Queen	14-18	
	Her Appearance	14-16	Descriptive/dramatic
	Her Avowal	17-18	Expository/(dramatic)*

*For details as to transitional patterns, see the helpful discussion and rich bibliographical data given by H. van Dyke Parunak, "Transitional Techniques in the Bible," JBL 102 (1983) 525-48.

and strength (vv 5, 10; cf. Exod 15:6, 12; Ps 16:8, 11),⁹ and the father and son (v 17; cf. Pss 2; 89:28f.; 103:13).¹⁰ All of these are wedded to a basic grid of Hebrew parallelism, in this case a rhetorical parallelism that fits the stated needs of lyricism for progression, whether descriptive (vv 3-6, 9-10), dramatic (vv 14-16), argumentative (vv 11-13), or expository, as demonstrated not only throughout the psalm but especially in vv 7-8 and 17-18.¹¹

Interestingly enough, the poet's variegated employment of lyric progression follows closely the transitional patterns of the psalm's structure. The psalm falls into two major portions (vv 2-10 and vv 11-18)-each introduced by the psalmist's own words (v 2 and vv 11-13)-after which the first section focuses upon the king, the second, the queen. The lyric poem may be analyzed as A/B in form. However, the presence of the key term "daughter" linking the two halves of the psalm in a *concatenatio* technique necessitates the refining of the pattern. Because the linked term "daughter" in v 10 corresponds to the subject of the second portion of the poem (forming an unbalanced *concatenatio*), the psalm may be rendered schematically Ab/B. Thus, the psalm may be schematized as in Table 1.

⁹ For discussion of the motif of the right hand, see my note at 2 Kgs 22:2 in the forthcoming *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) and R. Patterson, "The Song of Deborah," in *Tradition and Testament*, eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981) 140, 156.

¹⁰ The concept of God as Father to Israel, his son, is well attested in the OT (e.g., Exod 4:21-23; Isa63:16; Jer3:4, 19; Hos 11:1, etc.). For the king as God's son, see J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (Downers Grove: Allenson, 1975) 146-49.

¹¹ For the term rhetorical parallelism (but with wider application), see Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 222-27; for the isolation and importance of literary

Psalm Type

Although it has not always been included among the Royal Psalms by form critical scholars, modern scholarship increasingly tends to place Psalm 45 in that category.¹² Certainly the elevated tone and rich vocabulary of the psalm, as well as its ready application to Messiah in both Jewish and Christian traditions, argue that the psalm commemorates the wedding of some king in the Davidic line.¹³

Further, its title affirms that the psalm is part of a double collection of Korahite Psalms (Pss 42-49 and 84-85, 87-89), whose basic orientation is the praise of God through the reigning king (cf. v 7 with Pss 44.5, 46.6-12, 47, 48.2-4, 9, 15, 84.4, 85.5, 89). Accordingly, the king is God's anointed (v 8, cf. Ps 89:21, 39, 52) through whom God is victorious over the nations (vv 4-6, cf. Pss 42-43; 44; 46:8, 10-12; 47; 48:6-9; 89). The other Korahite Psalms emphasize that the king lives in close personal relationship with God and addresses him personally (Pss 42:2; 43: 1; 44:2; 48: 10, 11; 89:47, .50, 52), puts his trust in God (Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5; 84:13), and finds in him alone his redemption and place of refuge (Pss 43:1; 44:2-9, 24-27; 46:2-8; 47; 48:2-4, 9; 49:6-8, 15-16; 84:12-13; 85; 87), even in times of exile and distress (Pss 42-43; 44; 88). The king is conscious of God's love (Pss 42:9-10 44:4-8; 85:8; 89:21-34), reproduces God's righteousness in his life (Pss 43.3, 49.15, 84.12-13, 85.11-14, 89.3-6, 15-17), and worships him in the appointed services (Pss 42:3-6; 43:3-4; 46:5; 48:10; 84; 87).¹⁵ In the light of all of this, the psalm may safely be assumed to be

features common to Ugaritic and Hebrew see the various extended discussions in *RSP*, I, II, III. For a discussion of poetic progression, see c. F. Mam and P. J. Seng, *Poems* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1961) 242-62.

¹² For details see J. H. Eaton, *Kingship*, 1-86 and also M. Dahood, *Psalms* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 1:270; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 991; and J. H. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abmgdon, 1979) 312-13.

¹³ See further, M; Buittenwieser, *The Psalms* (New York: KT A V, 1969) 83-84; J. H. Eaton, *The Psalms* (London: SCM, 1979) 123. Contrariwise, M. D. Goulder (*The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* [Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1982] 130-35) argues for a Northern Kingdom cultic setting first composed for the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel and then utilized in subsequent festal liturgies.

¹⁴ That the Korahite Psalms should have a Davidic/ Royal orientation with special attention to the cultus is only natural. The Korahites were closely identified with David from the beginning of his adventures (I Chron 12:6) and became ultimately involved with the worship services set by David (cf. I Chron 6:18-12; 9:17-34; 26:1-19; Ps 84: II). The full expression of Korahite theology is found in Psalm 89.”

¹⁵ Other Korahite emphases are also found in Psalm 45, such as the place of the lyricist (v 2, cf. Pss 49:1-5; 89:1-2) and the emphasis on the right hand (vv 5, 8,10; cf. Pss 44:4; 48:11; 89:14, 26,43). In a very real way all the above features are gathered

a Royal Psalm celebrating the marriage of a king¹⁶ in the line of David (with whom God had entered into everlasting covenant [cf. 2 Sam 7:12-19; 1 Chron 17:7-27; Ps 89]).¹⁷

Grammatical-Historical Context

The question of the origin and Sitz im Leben of the psalm has been greatly disputed. Some have suggested a late date in the Persian period (understanding the psalm to have been written in honor of the bridal ceremony of a Persian queen),¹⁸ or even as late as the Ptolemaic period.¹⁹ The majority of modern commentators consider the psalm to be pre-exilic. However, here again many suggestions as to the time and occasion of its composition have been put forward. Perowne retains the older suggestions of Christian tradition that the marriage is Solomon's.²⁰ Hitzig prefers the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel, a view followed vigorously by Buttenwieser and Goulder.²¹ Franz Delitzsch argues eloquently for the marriage of Jehoram of the Southern Kingdom and Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of the Northern Kingdom.²² Still others associate the psalm with Jeroboam II²³ or Josiah,²⁴ or despairing of finding its original royal occasion, suggest its lasting quality is found in its annual use in an enthronement ceremony or its repeated use at the marriage ceremony of subsequent kings.²⁵

The wide disagreement among scholars as to the Psalm's Sitz im Leben makes a final assignment to any specific occasion most tenuous. Perhaps Delitzsch's view is most commendable. Linguistically, while the poem should probably not be understood to be as thoroughly

together in Psalm 89. For the place of the Korahite Psalms within the several collections of the Psalter, see O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper, 1976) 449-50.

¹⁶ The attempts of T. H. Gaster ("Psalm 45," *JBL* 74 [1955] 239-51) to interpret the psalm as non-royal seem ill-conceived.

¹⁷ For the place of Psalm 45 among the Messianic Psalms, see below.

¹⁸ See the discussion in J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 1:367.

¹⁹ See e.g., M. Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, 84.

²⁰ Perowne, *Psalms*, I :366-69. The identification of the proposed Solomonic bride is also in dispute, some opting for the daughter of Pharaoh, others for the daughter of Hiram of Tyre.

²¹ See Buttenwieser, *Psalms* 85-89; and M. Goulder, *Psalms of Korah*, 133-35.

²² See Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:74-76.

²³ Buttenwieser, *Psalms*, 84.

²⁴ See J. Mulder, *Studies on Psalm 45* (Witsiers: Almelo, 1972).

²⁵ See J. H. Eaton, *Kingship*, 118-20; cf. J. Goldingay, *Songs from a Strange Land* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978) 81; and N. R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 61.

Canaanite as Dahood understands it to be, there does appear to be a number of Phoenician/North Canaanite forms (e.g. אֶלֶּיךָ / 'aloes', and קִצְעָוֹת / 'cassia', v 9 [which may well have the feminine ending n- rather than the normal South Canaanite ending it הַ -], יְפִיפִיּוֹת / 'you are the fairest', v 3, a form with reduplicated root like Ugaritic dcdc / 'know well', and possibly, as Dahood insists, בְּתוּלוֹת / 'virgin', v 15).²⁶

Moreover, the prevalence of international commodities (e.g. כְּתָם / 'gold of Ophir', v 10; and שֵׁן / 'ivory', v 9) is reminiscent of Phoenician trading activities (cf. 1 Kgs 9:28; 10: 11-12, 22, 25).²⁷ The mention of an ivory palace (v 9) reminds one of the well-known palace of Ahab, Athaliah's father (1 Kgs 22:39).²⁸ Further, North Canaanite/ Phoenician connections may be found in the particular mention of the daughter of Tyre (v 13).²⁹

The union of the long feuding houses of Israel through the marriage of Jehoram and Athaliah would certainly serve as a momentous occasion, well worthy of commemoration in song. All of this suggests that Delitzsch's theory is not without merit. Nevertheless, Craigie's cautious dictum should be given due weight:

But having affirmed in principle that the song, in its initial setting, should be related to a particular occasion, it should also be admitted that no firm decision can be made with respect to its historical origin. . . . All that can be affirmed with reasonable certainty is that the psalm originated at some point in the history of the Hebrew monarchy.³⁰

THE SINGING OF THE PSALM

Although its precise original setting lacks final identification, this psalm itself may nonetheless be examined as a canonical composition,

²⁶ M. Dahood, *Psalms*, 1:275 remarks, "that b^etulot is singular is evident from the suffixes of 'ah^areha and re'oteha, which suppose an antecedent in the singular. Hence the morphology of *btwt* is Phoenician, like that of Prov ix 1, etc., *hokmot*, 'Wisdom,' which has been rightly explained by W. F. Albright in *VTS*, III (1955), p. 8, where he compares *hokmot* with Phoen. *milkot* (for **milkat*), 'Queen' (name of a deity)!"

²⁷ One might also possibly read שֵׁן שֵׁן an Egyptian lily oil (cf. Coptic *sofen*, 'lily'; note also the title עַל־שֵׁשֶׁנִּים 'upon the lilies') for MT שֵׁן שֵׁן C. Krahmalkov once suggested to me that the enigmatic פְּנִימָה 'within' may really conceal the name Phoenicians.

²⁸ For details, see my remarks at 2 Kgs 22:39 in the forthcoming *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Note also the mention of ivory in the condemnation of the King of Tyre in Ezek 27:6, 15.

²⁹ Note also the use of the foreign loan word for queen in 10: ?'J'J,' doubtless from Akkadian *sa ekal/T* / 'the one of the foreign lands' (cf. Neh 2:6 and Dan 5:2). Perhaps the granddaughter of the Tyrian king Ethbaal would appropriately be called by such a title.

³⁰ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 338.

which, due to inspiration of God, has abiding theological value and devotional application for all its readers.

Contextual Analysis

As noted in the previous literary analysis, after the title (v 1) the psalm may be divided into two major segments: (1) in praise of the king (vv 2-10) and (2) in praise of the queen (vv 11-18). Each segment is introduced by the psalmist's own words about the object of his singing (vv 2, 11-13). The psalm may be outlined as follows:

Title (v 1)

- I. *In praise of the king* (vv 2-10)
 - A. Poetic prelude (v 2)
 - B. His portrayal (vv 3-6)
 - C. His position (vv 7-10)
- II. *In praise of the queen* (vv 11-18)
 - A. Poetic advice (vv 11-13)
 - B. Her appearance (vv 14-16)
 - C. Her avowal (vv 17-18).

In Praise of the King

In his love song composed for the royal wedding, the psalmist "pictures" himself as present at the various stages of the wedding preparations. First he sees himself seated within the royal dressing chambers at the robing of the king. He awaits his opportunity to sing the king's praises:

My heart is astir
 With a goodly word.
 I myself would surely sing,
 My composition to the king;
 (For) my tongue is the pen
 Of a talented bard.³¹

As a prelude to the entire psalm, the poet reports his extreme excitement at the prospect of performing his song which had been composed for the occasion. It was doubtless sung to musical accompaniment. He mentions the fluttering of his heart;³² yet, he hopes that

³¹ סוֹפֵר מְהֵיר 'proficient scribe'. With all the skill of the most expert scribe, the psalmist's tongue would move through his composition. For discussion of the songfulness of the whole verse, see Buitenwieser, *Psalms*, 89.

³² Cf. Akkadian *rahasu*, 'be astir', and Arabic *rahasa*, 'flutter', 'move'.

his words will be articulate and appropriate so that his tongue moves as skillfully as the pen of a proficient scribe.³³

The prelude finished (v 2), the poet begins his lyric with a progressive description that portrays the robing of the king (vv 3-6). He begins with the king's person:

You are the fairest of men
 Grace(iousness) flows from your lips
 Therefore God has blessed you forever.

[v. 3]

He is the fairest of men.³⁴ He has above all an inner, God-given beauty that is demonstrated in the outward expressions of life (cf. Prov 22:11; Eccl 10:12; Luke 4:22). Accordingly, God has granted to him an everlasting blessedness-the very graciousness of the king is evidence that God has blessed him.

The psalmist moves next to a description of the king's robing:

Gird your sword upon (your) thigh
 "The hero of (your) strength and majesty"
 And by your majesty, succeed!

Mount up upon "For the word of truth"
 And (so) bring justice to I defend the poor.

Then may your right hand teach you awesome things,
 (With) your sharpened arrows
 Peoples shall fall beneath you,
 (Pierced) through the heart, the enemies of the king.

[vv 4-6]

These verses are extremely difficult. One needs only to glance at the various versions and translations and notice the efforts of the commentators to see the widely differing results. These verses remain a *crux interpretum*.

The following discussion suggests that vv 4-5 are built around a double imperative with the whole image being closed by a jussive of wish in v 6. These verses, then, describe ideally the investiture of the king. His are the garments of a heroic and mighty warrior. He is to put on his mighty sword, "The Hero of Strength and Majesty," by

³³ Buitenhuiser may be right in suggesting that the mood of the verb is one of wish, not an indicative; see Buitenhuiser, *Psalms*, 82, 89. The poet's essential modesty is thus preserved.

³⁴The Hebrew מעלעל form seems to be used here of an action which by repeated use produces a qualitative state of character. See further, *GKC* § 55e. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 336 calls attention to Ugaritic *tipp*, 'she beautifies herself'.

which he shall surely succeed. He is to mount up³⁵ upon his royal chariot, "For the Word of Truth," and so ride out to bring justice to all, especially to the downtrodden and disadvantaged of society. Accordingly, by his strong right hand he shall learn many awesome things and by his skillful bowmanship, the king's enemies shall fall beneath him.³⁶

Thus understood, this passage falls into line with the naming practices of the ancient Near East. Names were extremely important, being used not only to identify persons but, at times, to be descriptive of one's nature or character.³⁷ Indeed, he who or that which had no name, in a sense, did not exist.³⁸ Thus, the Akkadian phrase *mala sa*

35 **על רכב** often means "mount up upon" (cf. Akkadian *rakabu*, see *AHW*, 944 and the informative discussion of G. Liedke in *THAT*, 2:778-82). See especially 1 Sam 25:42; 2 Sam 19:27; 1 Kgs 13:13-14; 18:45; and 2 Kgs 9:16 where **רכב** is used of mounting together with an accompanying activity. Such familiar phrases as **רכב בערבות** 'rider on the clouds', (Ps 68:5; cf. Ugaritic *rkb* 'rpt) and **רכב השמים** / 'he who rides the heavens' (Deut 33:26; cf. Ps 68:34), as well as **רכב על-עב קל** / 'he who rides upon a swift cloud', (Isa 19:1) may all likewise be understood as "he who mounts/is mounted upon the clouds/heavens," The meaning "ride upon" is, of course, equally possible. If this latter meaning is the proper one for Psalm 45, the two verses here anticipate the description of Christ the victor in Rev 19: 11-16. For a full description of the divine epithet, see A. Cooper, "Divine Names and Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts," *RSP*, 3:458-60, For an interesting discussion as to the background of the picture in Rev 19:11-16 see R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 343-48,

³⁶ The last line of v6 defies final solution. The troublesome **בלב** may hide some well-understood elliptical phrase such as "smitten in/pierced through the heart." For brachylogy formed by omission of a clearly understood verb, see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax* (2ded.; Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976)§ 591. For the motif of the vanquished foe lying beneath the feet of the victor, see A. H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) 286; cf. *ANET*, 136.

³⁷ See further, R. deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) 43-48.

³⁸ Although U. Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. I. Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978] I: 130) is correct in pointing out that Adam's naming of the animals underscored his God-given leadership over them, and H. C. Leupold (*Exposition of Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942] 1:131-32) and C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (*Biblical Commentary on the Pentateuch* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 1:89) are right in emphasizing that the various animal names are given with deep insight into their character, in a full sense their very existence depended upon being named (from a Semitic point of view). Notice, for example, the opening lines of the Enuma Elish (*ANET*,60-61):

When on high the heaven had not been named,
Firm ground below had not been called by name, . . .
When no gods whatever had been brought into being,
Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined-
Then it was that the gods were formed within them.
Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called.

suma nabu / 'everything which is called by/bears a name' means anything that exists at all. The Code of Hammurapi expresses this idea by the phrase *awilutum sa sumam nabiat* / '(any) man who is called by / bears a name'.³⁹ In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the report that "my name was not carried off" means that the man himself was not so treated.⁴⁰

Not only persons and animals but objects were considered to be sharers in the essential nature of their name. E. Lefebvre observes:

The name of a person or a thing is an effective representation of it, and thus becomes the object itself in a less substantial and more adaptable form, which is more susceptible to intellectual treatment: in short, it forms a mental substitute. . . . The name, which we regard as an image of the object in question, seems consequently to be an essential element or projection of it.⁴¹

Hence, in the ancient Near East everything was given a name gods, the months of the year (months were named after gods), persons, and cities (e.g. "Bond of heaven and earth," i.e., Nippur; cf. Jer 33: 16, Ezek 48:35). Temples received such names as Egirzalanki, "The temple which is the joy of heaven and earth," and palaces and their courts bear such illustrious names as "May Nebuchadnezzar live, may he who provided for Esagila live to old age" (cf. I Kgs 7:2) , and "Court of the Row of the Socles of the Igigi." Gates bore names such as "Enlil keeps the foundation of my city secure" and "Ninlil creates abundance" (cf. Ezek 48:35-39; Neh 2:13-15; Acts 3:2), as did walls (e.g., "Baal has shown it favor" [cf. Neh 3:8]) and canals (e.g., "Hammurapi is the source of abundance for mankind").⁴²

For the purposes of the context of Ps 45:4-5, it is important to notice that, much as Prince Valiant had his "Singing Sword" or Alexander the Great had his famous warhorse Bucephalus, weapons were often similarly named in the ancient Near East:

Enlil raised the bo(w, his wea)pon, and laid (it) before them,
The gods, his fathers, saw the net he had made.
When they beheld the bow, how skillful its shape,

³⁹ See G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960),2:100,292; cf. CAD, "N,"):35.

⁴⁰ See the notice by G. Contenau, *Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria* (New York: Norton, 1966) 161.

⁴¹ As cited by Ibid. See, also the dynamic quality of the divine name as discussed by T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1970) 105-6.

⁴² See the extended discussion in G. Contenau, *Everyday Life*, 158-62; see also CAD, "N," 1:33-35. Note also the Solomonic pillars, Jakin and Boaz (I Kgs 7:21).

His fathers praised the work he had wrought.
 Raising (it), Anu spoke up in the Assembly of the gods,
 As he kissed the bow: "This is my daughter!"
 He named the names of the bow as follows:
 "Longwood is the first, the second is (. . .);
 Its third name is Bow-Star, in heaven I have made it shine."⁴³

The Ugaritic god Kothar-we-Hassis named the two weapons that he gave to Baal, Yagrus / 'Driver' and *Aymur* / 'Expeller'. Sennacherib named his javelin "Piercer of throats," his battle helmet "Emblem of battle," and his chariots "Conqueror of enemies," and "Vanquisher of the wicked and evil."⁴⁴

If the Israelite king is viewed as possessing named battle weapons, they all would bear designations especially appropriate to the king's role as God's earthly representative. They would depict his struggle against the forces of evil and for the cause of righteousness.⁴⁵ The sword would symbolize the God-given strength which alone would guarantee triumph against his and God's foes. His chariot would remind him of his obligation to effect the justice of the poor and disadvantaged, so often an object of exploitation. The poetic challenges remind one of Hammurapi's famous boasts that the gods had called him, "To make justice appear in the land, to destroy the evil and wicked (and so that) the strong might not oppress the weak," and "so that the strong might not oppress the weak (so as) to give justice to the orphaned (homeless) girl and to the widow."⁴⁶ As God himself, the king will triumph gloriously (and God would triumph through the king).⁴⁷ The enemy, being felled by the unswervingly accurate arrows' propelled from the king's bow, would lie prostrate and trampled under foot.

The ideal representation of the robed king gives way to an expository analysis of his royal position:

⁴³ *ANET*, 69.

⁴⁴ R. Borger, *Babylonisch-Assyrische Lesestücke* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1963) 3:49, 50 (Sennacherib, V, 68-73; VI, 7-8). For the Ugaritic sources, see C. Gordon, *UT*, 316.

⁴⁵ Craigie (*Psalms 1-50*, 339) aptly remarks, "he has a warrior's sword, but its use. . . is such that he is accorded characteristics normally reserved for God, namely 'splendor' and 'majesty' (v. 4; cf. Ps 96:6). His battles are on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness (v. 5); his enemies, against whom he rides out in battle, are the enemies of the same virtues, and therefore must be conquered." For the figure of God as a mighty, fully equipped warrior riding forth in his battle chariot, see Hab 3:8-15; Ps 18:14ff.; 77:15-18.

⁴⁶ See CH Ia:32-39; XXIVb:59-62. For the prevalence of similar themes throughout the ancient Near East, see the bibliographical data in n. 8.

⁴⁷ Cf. Exod 15:6, 12, see also n. 9.

Your throne, O God
 Is forever;⁴⁸
 A sceptre of righteousness
 Is the sceptre of your kingdom.
 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
 Therefore, God, your God; has anointed you
 With the oil of gladness above your companions.

[w 7-8]

The supposed difficulty of calling the idealized king אלהים was addressed long ago by Delitzsch:

And since elsewhere earthly authorities are also called אלהים, Ex. xxi. 6, xxii. 7 sq., PS.lxxxii., cf. cxxxviii.l, because they are God's representatives and the bearers of His image upon earth, so the king who is celebrated in this Psalm may be all the more readily styled Elohim, when in his heavenly beauty, his irresistible doxa of glory, and his divine holiness, he seems to the psalmist to be the perfected realization of the close relationship in which God has set David and his seed to Himself.⁴⁹

It was because the earthly Davidic king ideally personified God on the throne that he could justly be called god.⁵⁰ God, then, reigned through the king who, as did his sovereign who had anointed him, was to love righteousness and hate wickedness-righteousness was to be the very sceptre of his kingdom.

Ps 45:7 was considered messianic by Jewish and early Christian interpreters alike. One need not become enmeshed in controversy over whether the words have direct/primary reference to Christ or to a Judean king. Based on the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7: 12-29; I Chron 17:7-27; and Psalm 89) which remains inviolable (cf. Jer 23:5-6; 33: 14-17; and Ezek 34:20-24; 37:21-28), the promise of God

⁴⁸ Virtually every conceivable means of translating the opening lines of v 7 has been tried: (1) Your throne is God forever, (2) Your throne of God is forever, (3) Your throne is like God's, forever, (4) May your throne be divine forever, (5) God has enthroned you forever, (6) The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you, etc. The translation of אלהים as a vocative (which nearly all expositors concede is the straightforward sense of the Hebrew) is fully defensible here. See further A. M. Harman, "The Syntax and Interpretation of Psalm 45:7," *The Law and the Prophets*, eds. J. H. Skilton, M. C. Fisher and L. W. Sloat (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 337-47.

⁴⁹ F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2:83; see further M. Goulder, *Psalms of Korah*: 130.

⁵⁰ See also 2 Sam 23:2-7. For a detailed discussion of the relationship of God to (the Davidic king who was to rule as though he were identified with God himself and who was to live out God's person and standards in his life, see J. H. Eaton, *Kingship*, 135-97.

is irrevocable, whether applied to David, his royal descendants or to the greater descendant, Christ himself (cf. Luke 1:68-69 and Acts 13:32-37).⁵¹

The mention of the king's anointing⁵² becomes the hook/ linkage to return to a description of the present ceremony. Similarly, the mentioning of stringed instruments out of the palace is a springboard for envisioning the time when the king shall stand in the palace, his new queen beside him:

Myrrh and Aloes, cassia (too)
 (Are) all your garments;
 From an ivory palace,
 Stringed instruments make you glad.
 [v 9]

Craigie sets the scene well:

The anointing with oil (v. 8) refers poetically to the anointing of the king for his royal task, but the immediate point of reference is probably to be found in the activities of the wedding ceremony as such; the king would be anointed as a part of the preparation for the celebration itself. ...After the anointing, the groom would be decked in royal robes, fragrant with precious perfumes (v. 9a); in the background, the stringed instruments can already be heard striking up their music (v.9b).⁵³

The general facts concerning the ancient Near Eastern wedding ceremony are clear and the details of the psalm fit well those data.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Although some poetry is designedly prophetic (cf. Ps 16:10 with Acts 2:25-31), such need not be the case here. For the relationship of poetry and prophecy, see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise to David in Psalm 16 and Its Application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37," *JETS* 23 (1980) 207-18; D. N. Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," in *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu*, eds. V. L. Tollers and J. R. Maier (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 92-98. N. R. Lightfoot (Jesus Christ Today, 61) appropriately remarks, "The psalm is an ideal representation of the king and his kingdom, not a description of things as they actually were at anyone time in history. The author of Hebrews regards the passage as intensely messianic and sees the reign of the Messiah as the perfect fulfillment of the ideal depicted in the Old Testament." For the relationship of the Davidic Covenant and the Royal Psalms, see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 159-64.

⁵² For the "oil of gladness," see n. 27. The placing of God's anointing of the king after a discussion of the enthroned king may be intentional, containing a veiled hint of Messiah. The precise order for the present arrangement of the Korahite Psalms as a whole can be discerned in terms of linkage, each succeeding psalm containing some distinct hook to the immediately preceding psalm.

⁵³ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 339.

⁵⁴ See deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, 33-34; cf. Goldingay, *Songs*, 81.

Here, having sketched the lovely scene of the pleasantries of the occasion (the anointing [v 8b], the sweet smelling garments⁵⁵ and the fine music [v 9]),⁵⁶ the poet foregoes chronological description⁵⁷ to carry through his discussion concerning the king to that moment when his bride⁵⁸ will stand in the marriage hall of the palace beside him, a lovely treasure bedecked in garments woven of finest gold (v 10).

The / a princess is with/ among your prized ladies
The queen stands at your right hand
(Clothed in) the gold of Ophir.

[v 10]

In approaching this time, the author thus provides himself with a hook by which to turn his attention to the bride herself (vv 11-16).

In Praise of the Queen

As with the former section, so this portion begins with the words of the poet. Having approached the time when his bride shall stand beside her royal groom, the psalmist interrupts his narrative with some words of wisdom:

Hear, O daughter, and see
Yea, incline your ear;
Forget your people
And your father's house.

⁵⁵ For the importance of spices in the Ancient Near East see G. W. Van Beek, "Frankincense and Myrrh," *BA* 23 (1960) 69-95. For the significance of myrrh in relation to the visit of the magi at the birth of Christ, see R. Patterson, "Special Guests at the First Christmas," *Fundamentalist Journal*, 2 (1983) 31-32, 39.

⁵⁶ מְנִי is frequently emended to מְנִיִּם ("stringed instruments"). It may, of course, also be pointed as a plural construct followed by a verbal sentence: "The stringed instruments which make you glad" (cf. GKC § 130d). The fact that the palace here would be the groom's does not set aside the custom that musicians would come from both courts when royal marriages were involved. This may account for the use of the plural form for "palaces" in this verse. All of this, together with the details relative to the "ivory palace," may help in determining the occasion for the psalm. See n. 28.

⁵⁷ For the interruption of chronology for topical purposes in narrative structure, see my remarks concerning literary form in the forthcoming *Expositor's Bible Commentary* volume on Kings.

⁵⁸ Since שֶׁגֶל is singular, probably the corresponding parallel term that precedes, בְּנָת, should be viewed as a dialectical singular rather than being retained as a plural (despite the presence of a harem). Although some have suggested that the queen involved might have been the dowager, the flow of the narrative argues for the bride herself. If the queen in question was Athaliah, the term retains a certain appropriateness; see n. 29.

Let the king desire your beauty
 For he is your master;
 Bow down to him,
 And the daughter of Tyre (shall come) with a gift,
 The wealthiest of people shall entreat your favor.

[vv 11-13]

As he had charged the anointed king (v 3), so he admonishes the queen. She is to take careful note of his words and understand that past allegiances are now secondary. "Forget your people and your family"-the language is designedly hyperbolic to remind her that as no longer merely a princess but a queen, her primary obligation is to the king of Judah (God's appointed ruler). Further, her very subservience to him, proper as it is (he is her master), will have personal and practical benefits. The king will desire her in all her beauty all the more.⁶⁰ Moreover, personal recognition will come to her,⁶¹ for wealthy people⁶² will entreat her favor with rich gifts.⁶³

Now the poet allows his audience to see the bride herself:

All glorious is the princess within;
 Her garment is made from finely worked gold.
 Over a richly textured carpet, she is led to the king;
 The virgins, her companions, behind her, being brought to you.
 They are conducted with joy and gladness; entering the palace of the king.⁶⁴

[vv 14-16]

⁵⁹ Notice that the hook **בנת**, now cast in proper southern dialect, **בת**, undergoes word play in this section (vv 11, 13) and also serves as a key term in the next subsection beginning with v 14. Note also the familiar poet's device of mixing imperative and jussive forms,

⁶⁰ The bride's beauty (:1£') stands in (inferior) parallel to the extolling of the king (v 3).

⁶¹ **ובת־צֶרֶךְ** can be variously understood: (1) of the bride, the wow being vocative, (2) of the Queen of Tyre (could it be an indication of the bride's people and family whom she has been charged to forget, thus making her a Phoenician princess?), (3) of the Tyrians, the term being used as a designation for the nation/ city itself as is common in the prophets (so Leupold), or (4) of a "Tyrian robe" (so Dahood, reading *bot sor*); but such a pointing ignores the word play on n~, 'daughter'. Likewise, Dahood's suggestion to take **עֲשִׂירֵי עָם** as "banquet guests" is extremely forced,

⁶² Whether the phrase refers to rich Tyrians only or to rich people in general is debated,

⁶³ **חלה** (cf. Arabic *bola*) means to "be sweet," "make soft," hence the force, "conciliate." The climactic parallelism determines that both the Queen of Tyre and the wealthy shall seek her favor with suitable gifts.

⁶⁴ Notice again that **בת** is the hook that carries the poem to the next discussion,

In her quarters within the palace,⁶⁵ the princess is seen in all her finery. Her inner happiness radiates both from her person and through the splendid wedding dress of delicately woven gold. She is "all glorious."

The narrative progresses. The bride, now attired in her richly embroidered garments is ready for the festive occasion. Here she comes! She is escorted out of her chambers and to the marriage hall of the palace by her ladies-in-waiting.⁶⁶ It is a happy scene. Amidst songs of love and unrestrained joy,⁶⁷ the princess reaches the palace, enters the great hall, travels down the richly variegated rug laid down for the occasion,⁶⁸ and takes her place beside the king.

Here the scene breaks off.⁶⁹ There is no mention of the great feast that doubtless followed.⁷⁰ Rather, the poet leaves his hearers with these words:

65 פְּנִימָה 'within', may be elliptical. Buitenwieser (Psalms, 91) suggests some such phrase as בְּיַת פְּנִימָה 'in the palace' (cf. 2 Kgs 7:11). Since the bride is led to the palace proper in v 16, the word would then, as Kidner (*Psalms 1-72*, 173) points out, refer to her dressing chambers. M. Goulder (*Psalms of Korah*, 135-36), suggests that פְּנִימָה designates the women's quarters to which the bride goes to lay aside her day clothing to put on her "still more splendid night attire." Thus, clad in beautiful embroidered night attire, she is carried on a richly embroidered sedan chair to the king's chambers, accompanied by her escorts, and to the cheers of the watching crowd (vv 14-15). Certainly פְּנִימָה has occasioned many interpretive guesses. My wife's suggestion that the word may refer to the bride-to-be's inner radiance and happiness which rivals the external splendor of her wedding garment is not without merit.

⁶⁶ Because the person of the king is the chief focus of the poem (even here in the description of the bridal possession), the queen is pictured as coming to the prince! king. The enallage, so common in poetry (cf. Song of Solomon), is understandable and makes unnecessary suggestions to emend the text.

⁶⁷ Cf. Jer 16:9.

⁶⁸ Dahood (Psalms, 1:275) suggests reading *lirqamot* here and understanding the word to refer to a group of professional brocaders (cf. 2 Kgs 23:7). He notes the presence of those who did brocading in gold in ancient Ugarit. Most commentators retain the idea of the queen's variegated garments, mentioned in the previous verse. I am inclined to follow the suggestion of Perowne (*Psalms*, 1:378-79) who conjectures that the reference is to a richly colored tapestry laid down before the palace over which the bridal procession would enter into the marriage hall: "But I think Maurer is right in rendering *In stragulis versicoloribus*. He observes that the dress of the bride has already been mentioned twice, ver. 9(10), and 13(14); and that the prep. לְ is not used of motion to a place, but of rest in a place. It is used of walking on, or over, Hab. i.6." Maurer's observation regarding the use of the preposition has been reenforced in recent days by M. O. Futato, "The Preposition 'Beth' in the Hebrew Psalter," *WTJ* 41 (1978) 68-83, who emphasizes that לְ means "position at, pertaining to or belonging to" (p. 71). Futato's careful presentation of the data relative to the idiomatic employment of preposition plus verb in the Northwest Semitic languages, constitutes a needed correction to those who would freely interchange or find excessive overlap in the semantic fields of the various Hebrew prepositions.

⁶⁹ So understood, the descriptions of both groom (v 10) and bride (v 16) end with the mention of the palace.

⁷⁰ See deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, 34.

Instead of your fathers, will be your sons;
 You will set them as princes throughout the land.
 I shall make your name to be remembered through all generations;
 Therefore shall peoples thank you forever and ever!

[vv17-18]

Since the object of the address given in the MT is masculine, the words must be intended for the king. But who is the speaker? It is frequently assumed to be the psalmist himself. Yet one must not forget, as Buitendijk has stated in another connection, that modesty was becoming to the ancient singer no less than the modern one.⁷¹ Accordingly, although the psalmist may have used imperatives to encourage the king to perform his royal functions in righteousness (vv 4-5) and to admonish the foreign princess (vv 11-13), it seems unlikely that he would assert that in the flow of history, as the royal family grew and (ideally) extended its sway, the psalmist's poem would cause the king's name to be everlastingly remembered.

Two other possibilities commend themselves. (1) The poet may be recording God's own added blessing on the occasion, renewing his promise to his earthly representative—a pledge that will find consummation in the messianic king. (2) The words may contain the loving commitment of the bride to the king. Since a bride did not speak at all at an ancient Near Eastern wedding ceremony, these words would then be part of the exchange of the royal pair within the wedding chambers.. If so, the psalm ends on a note of tender intimacy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PSALM

Contextual Application

Historically

Although no final decision was made for the setting of the psalm in this paper, it has been noted that an excellent case can be made for the wedding of Jehoram and Athaliah. Assuming for the moment that Delitzsch is correct in assigning this psalm to that event, it is instructive to note the lessons of history.

Certainly it is true that a lasting marriage must be based upon more than physical attraction. Interestingly enough, while the psalmist praises the beauty of the queen in her lovely attire, nothing is said of her spiritual or moral qualities. Indeed, if that princess was Athaliah, the omission is all the more meaningful. Athaliah was to prove herself every bit the reflection of her mother, Jezebel. For, when Jehoram had died and his son Ahaziah was killed in the wild events surrounding Jehu's *coup d'etat* (2 Kgs 8:28-29; 9: 14-29), Athaliah seized the

⁷¹ See n. 33.

power of state for herself, killing all the royal males except for Joash, who had been concealed by Jehosheba and Jehoiada (2 Kgs 11:1-3). She subsequently initiated her mother's debased pagan religion into the Southern Kingdom and ruled wickedly for some seven years. Nor was the ideal king, Jehoram, any real bargain. Although he is commemorated as a capable warrior, he is also remembered as a wicked king who slew all his brothers (who might have proved to be rivals to the throne of Jehoshaphat) and was probably influenced by his wife's heathenism. Accordingly, God punished Judah with revolts and outright invasion, and Jehoram was personally afflicted with an incurable disease. So loathsome was this man, that he was buried without proper state ceremony (2 Chronicles 21).

Theologically

The importance of the person of the king has been noticed. In a very real sense Psalm 45, as the Korahite Psalms in general, is a reminder that the welfare of God's people was intricately intertwined with and indissolubly bound to the person of the king. Not only the king's prosperity and well being, but his character and spiritual privileges as well were to be shared by all the community of believers.⁷² Therefore, the Psalms, and particularly the Royal Psalms, as expressions of personal commitment and communion with God, took on a dimension of reality for all the members of the covenant community. This is no less true for today's believer, for the One in whom the psalmist's song finds full application has come. Far more than any earthly member of the Davidic line, the anointed one, Christ is that mighty warrior (cf. Isa 9:6). He is the Mighty God who has conquered Satan, sin and death by his victory on the cross (Col 2:15) and resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:30-36; I Cor 15:50-57). A conquering, ascended king, he ever leads a victorious host in his retinue, properly attired and equipped for spiritual battle (Eph 6:12-17). Not only are his subjects "dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne",⁷³ but they have also been invested with the weaponry that will equip them to be victorious in their spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-18; cf. Isa 59:17). "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor 2: 14)!

His shall be the ultimate victory over the ungodly forces of this world in that great climactic battle that Ezekiel, Joel and Zechariah so vividly prophesied. John pictures that coming to earth in terms reminiscent of Psalm 45:

⁷² See Eaton, Kingship, 165-68.

⁷³ Edward Mote, "The Solid Rock."

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one but he himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, Christ continues to reign in the hearts and lives of all those who make up his earthly train of followers so that they may share in his eternal riches (2 Cor 8:9). Far more than any idealized king, Christ is a God of all goodness. Because all moral perfection resides in him, as his ambassadors Christians are to reflect his character in all their living (Eph 4:1-5:20; Col 3:1-17).

The consideration of the bride of the psalm also arrests one's theological attention. The Christian believer is the bride of Christ (2 Cor II: 1-4; Eph 5:25-27). Paul admonished the waiting bride of Christ to be faithful and so to have a productive marriage. For that reason the church has been married to her saving husband and has become one spirit with him, her body having become the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6: 15-19). As his bride, she is to keep herself pure (I John 3:1-3), remembering the wedding price that Christ himself has paid (I Cor 6:20). She is to be obedient to him who loved her and sacrificed himself for her (Gal 2:20). As a thankful bride, she is to rejoice in her heavenly husband and allow his life to be lived out in hers (Col 3: 1-4).

PRACTICAL ADMONITION

Scholarship, yes! Surely Christian scholars need to bring their best critical faculties to this and other portions of the Scriptures so that the precise truth of the Word may be more clearly perceived. But in so doing, scholarship must ever be directed to knowing more intimately him who is the truth.

The victorious king, the heavenly bridegroom, has done so much for his own. Christians stand accepted in the Beloved One (Col 1:12-14); they have been taken into union with him and so have free access to God the Father (Eph 1:15-2:22; Heb 4:16, 19-23). They

⁷⁴ Rev 19:11-16, *NIV*.

have been granted the high privilege of enjoying life in all of its God-intended abundant fulness (John 10:10). Because Christians are subjects who are vitally united to the King of Kings, they no less than the OT saints with their kings, are challenged to enter into its abiding content; its prayer and praise are theirs. What an impetus to communion, worship, walk, and witness! What a privilege and responsibility! May the marriage vows of everlasting fidelity to the Heavenly Husband heartily be renewed so that the bride is holy and effectively productive. Thus, there will be ever greater joy when Christians shall at last see him face to face. Perhaps then the modern poet's song will become ours too:

Oh I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved's mine!
 He brings a poor vile sinner into His "house of wine."
 I stand upon His merit-I know no other stand,
 Not e'en where glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

The Bride eyes not her garment but her dear Bridegroom's face;
 I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace.
 Not at the crown He giveth but on His pierced hand;
 The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Anne Ross Cousins, "The Sands of Time."

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