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Frank W. Nelte

PSALM 45:6-7 EXPLAINED

Here is a question I have received regarding Psalm 45.

“I would be interested, if you care to discuss, how you interpret Ps.45:7 and Heb. 1:9 since **this is obviously referring to Christ** being anointed. **Who do you think these fellows are** who Christ was anointed above? I do not recall this was ever discussed in Worldwide or ever addressed by Herbert Armstrong in any sermon or publication.”

That's the question, and here is Psalm 45:7.

Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness **above thy fellows**. (Psalm 45:7)

The questioner agrees that this is a statement about Jesus Christ. Now some people believe that this reference to “above your fellows” is supposed to mean “**above your fellow angels**”. But is that really what this verse means? And if this is not a reference to angels, then who is this speaking about?

Since some people approach this verse from the perspective that this is a reference to angels, the questioner here may well have wondered about this point of view?

Now while I am not aware of any church literature that addresses Psalm 45:6-7, I myself have addressed these verses a number of times over the years in my sermons and Bible Studies. The explanation is fairly straightforward.

But before we look at what these verses do mean, let's start off by examining the implied but unspoken question: is this a reference to angels?

THE HEBREW WORD FOR “ANGELS”

The OT Hebrew word translated as “angel” is “**malak**”. This Hebrew word literally means “**messenger**”, and it can correctly be applied to anyone (spirit being or human being) who carried a message to certain people. The word “malak” does not give any hint as to any personal attributes of the messenger; rather, this word focuses solely on the job entrusted to the individual. The same is true for our English word “messenger”.

Now the word “malak” is used in **two distinct ways** in the Old Testament, and this has created some confusion for some people.

1) On the one hand “malak” is used as a designation for **a category** of created spirit beings, which we call “**angels**”. Our word “angels” is derived from the Greek word “aggelos”, which also means “messenger”, and it is in fact the correct Greek translation of the Hebrew word “malak”. So whenever “malak” refers to a member of this group of spirit beings, then it is appropriate to translate it into English as “angel”.

2) On the other hand the word “malak” is also used to identify **anyone** who is fulfilling **the job of a messenger**. The individual entrusted with the responsibility to deliver a message could be a spirit being (i.e. an angel or even Jesus Christ) or it could be a human being (i.e. a man or a woman).

By focusing on **the job** entrusted to a specific individual, the Hebrew word “malak” by itself gives us no clues at all as to whether the “malak” is a God Being or an angel or a human being. It is **always the context** in which the word “malak” is used that will show us how it is to be correctly understood.

Thus:

1) Since **Jesus Christ** is shown as bringing **a message from God the Father**, therefore in some instances the word “malak” is used to refer to Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean that Jesus Christ is an angel, because **the word “malak” by itself never reveals the status of the messenger**. It only means that in such cases the word “malak” focuses on the specific job Jesus Christ is fulfilling in that specific context.

2) The word “malak” may also refer to any member of the category of spirit beings we call **angels**. By designating this category of created spirit beings with the Hebrew word “malak” (i.e. “angels”), it focuses on the primary purpose for which God created these spirit beings. Their primary job responsibility is to function as messengers between God and mankind.

3) The word “malak” may also refer to **any human being** who is given the responsibility to deliver a message. And so “malak” may refer to someone who carries a message from God to certain people, and it may also refer to someone who carries a message from a king or ruler to certain other people. The focus is on the job which in these instances has been entrusted to the individual identified by the Hebrew word “malak”.

Put another way, the correct meaning of the Hebrew word “malak” is always “messenger”. “Malak” does not inherently mean “angel”! Rather, the designation “angel” is **one specific narrow application** of the Hebrew word “malak”, simply because God decided to create a category of spirit beings whose main job functions are best described by the word “messengers”. But the spirit beings comprising this category are by no means the only ones who would ever function as “messengers”. And so there is no way that the Hebrew word “malak” can possibly be limited to angels. “Messenger” is the actual meaning of the Hebrew word “malak”; and “angel” is one particular, and in most cases quite acceptable and appropriate interpretation of that meaning.

So here is a key we need to keep in mind:

When the word “malak” refers to a human being (e.g. a prophet) then it doesn't mean that the human being is the same as an angel, who is also identified as “malak”. Human beings and angels are on two different levels of existence (one is a physical being and the other is a spirit being), even though the word “malak” may apply to both.

Likewise, when the word “malak” is used to refer to Jesus Christ, then that doesn't mean that Jesus Christ is an angel! Jesus Christ and angels are also on two different levels of existence (One is an eternal God Being and the others are created spirit beings), even though the word “malak” may apply to both.

A problem arises when people insist on in some places translating “malak” as “angel” and thereby confuse the intended meaning of “malak” in a specific context. People have no difficulty at all in recognizing that when Jacob sent “malakim” (or “malachim”) to his brother Esau (Genesis 32:3) that this **OBVIOUSLY** meant human beings and **not angels**, because the sole focus was on the job

entrusted to those individuals and not on their level of existence. But those same people may insist that **when “malak” is used to refer to Jesus Christ**, then it couldn't possibly be with the sole focus on the job entrusted to Jesus Christ in that specific context; no, then it must be (according to some people) a reference to the category of being that Christ supposedly belongs to, that He supposedly is or was an angel.

Such people fail to understand that as a job description the word “malak” obviously **transcends the boundaries** that define the category of spirit beings we refer to as “angels”. And “malak” can exceed those angelic boundaries in both directions: **downwards** to the level of human beings, **and upwards** to the God level of Jesus Christ. The selection of individuals to function as messengers is obviously not limited to angels. The only Being who can never be a messenger is God the Father, who is the supreme Being in existence. All other beings below God the Father, from Jesus Christ on down to the lowest human being could potentially become messengers in some way or other.

It is a mistake to assume that “malak” can only refer to two categories of beings: that it must EITHER be a reference to human beings, OR it must be a reference to angelic beings. When the Bible clearly identifies that Jesus Christ brings a message from God the Father, then there is no justification for some people to assume that THEREFORE Jesus Christ must be a member of the category of spirit beings identified as “angels” simply because the Hebrew word “malak” is used to describe this specific responsibility.

Jesus Christ is not, and never has been, a member of the category of created spirit beings we call “angels”.

Now let's look at the Hebrew word translated as “fellows” in Psalm 45:7.

THE HEBREW WORD “CHABER” (or “HABER”)

The Hebrew word rendered “fellows” in Psalm 45:7 is “chaber”. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says: **“This word is used as an adjective and noun to refer to the very close bond that can exist between persons.”** The word means: “to join, to unite, to be in agreement, to be involved in a very close relationship”. The word is used 12 times in the OT, and in the KJV it is translated 7 times as “companion” and 4 times as “fellow”. Our problem here is that in English we don't actually have a word that adequately conveys the correct meaning of “chaber”. Neither “companion” nor “fellow” really expresses the actual meaning of “chaber”; these two words are nothing more than the best from an inadequate selection of words available to us in English, though “companion” comes closer to the intended meaning than “fellows”.

Simply put, this word refers to a very close relationship. So the relevant clause in Psalm 45:7 should correctly read:

“... therefore God, Your God has anointed You with oil of gladness **ABOVE THOSE WITH WHOM YOU HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**”.

So the question now is: does Jesus Christ have a close relationship with angels? What does the Bible reveal in this regard? Forget about “fellows”!

In the Book of Hebrews Paul quotes these verses from Psalm 45. And in the Book of Hebrews Paul also illustrated Jesus Christ's vastly superior status to anyone and everyone else (obviously excluding God the Father, the principle of 1 Corinthians 15:27) by means of three comparisons. Firstly, **as a spirit being** Jesus Christ is vastly superior to angels (chapter 1). Secondly, **as a lawgiver** Jesus Christ is

vastly superior to Moses (chapter 3). And thirdly, **as a high priest** Jesus Christ is vastly superior to Aaron (chapter 5).

Rather than showing Jesus Christ in some close relationship (the meaning of “fellows”) with the angels, Hebrews chapter 1 shows **a contrast** between Jesus Christ and the angels. Notice verse 5.

For **unto which of the angels** said he **at any time**, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?” (Hebrews 1:5)

Paul’s point in this statement is very clear: at no time has God the Father EVER said to ANY angel “you are My Son”. This statement all by itself means that Jesus Christ could not possibly ever have been an angel! If Jesus Christ had originally been just one of the angels, then Hebrews 1:5 would not be true!

This statement also illustrates that just like the Hebrew word “malak”, so also **the Hebrew word for “son” (i.e. “ben”)** is used with **distinctly separate meanings**. It is always the context which makes clear the intended meaning of the word for “son”.

Thus regarding our situation here: In Job 1:6 the **angels** are referred to as “sons of God”. In Luke 3:38 **Adam** is referred to as “the son of God” (the word “son” is implied as in all the previous verses). And in Mark 1:1 **Jesus Christ** is called “the Son of God”. And in 1 Timothy 1:2 Paul referred to **Timothy** as “my own son in the faith”.

Now in spite of Job 1:6 Paul made the emphatic statement in Hebrews 1:5 that God the Father has never at any time addressed any of the angels as “My Son”! This means that the word “son” in Job 1:6 cannot possibly have the identical meaning to the word “son” in Hebrews 1:5.

The Hebrew word “ben” is formed from the Hebrew verb “banah”, which means “to build” or “to produce”. And so in the Bible the word “son” is also used by God with **two distinct meanings**:

1) Applied in relation to God, the word “son” indicates **anyone** who was **created** (i.e. “built” or “established”) **by God**. This use of the word “son” does not necessarily involve any “begettal” stage or process. And neither does it require input from two different individuals. This is the sense in which both, **the angels** and also **Adam** are “sons of God”. This use of the word “son” also applies to Paul’s reference to **Timothy** as “his son”, in the sense that Timothy’s conversion was in part due to the work Paul had done in preaching the truth of God. This particular process of producing “sons” does not necessarily involve the direct transfer of specific inherent attributes from the individual who is identified as “the father” to the individuals who are identified as “sons”.

2) The word “son” also indicates one **very specific** and **narrowly defined** form of creation, i.e. as the end product of a begettal process that requires input from two different individuals. This is **the most common way we understand the word “son”**. The begettal process involves passing on specific intrinsic attributes from “the father” to “the son”. This process, while maintaining individuality, ensures that there will be a great many similarities between the father and the son, with many attributes being common to the father and the son.

It is a mistake to want to limit the meaning of the word “son” to the situation that absolutely requires a begettal process because the angels are not the product of any begettal process. The reason for this should be immediately apparent: a begettal process always requires input from two distinct individuals. But that was not the case with the creation of the angels. Therefore the word “sons” in the expression “sons of God” in Job 1:6 does not have this meaning that requires a begettal process.

When we think of the word “son” we mostly tend to think of this second situation, the situation that involves a begettal process requiring input from two different individuals. Now this begettal process can take place on two different levels. **On the physical level** the begettal process is initiated when a sperm unites with an egg cell. **On the spirit level** the begettal process is initiated **when the earnest of God’s Holy Spirit unites with the spirit in man in a human being**. This is the process that applies to us human beings having the opportunity to become “sons of God” (Romans 8:19). In plain language: we ourselves have an enormous amount of input towards our ultimate “manifestation” as sons of God; God’s input alone cannot achieve that ultimate “manifestation” within us. Our part in this process is absolutely essential!

Getting back to our comparison of Jesus Christ and the angels:

In Hebrews 1:13 Paul quoted Psalm 110:1, clearly implying that this statement is a reference to Jesus Christ. Paul shows that Jesus Christ will SIT at the right hand of God the Father. By contrast, in the next verse Paul states that the angels are serving spirits sent out to serve God’s people (verse 14).

Thus in Hebrews 1 Paul makes quite clear, by means of contrasting statements, that Jesus Christ does NOT have a close relationship with the angels. Paul shows that the relationship is in fact a very gracious master-to-servant relationship, one in which the servants appreciate their positions.

This means that the concluding statement of Psalm 45:7 (“... therefore God, Your God has anointed You with oil of gladness **ABOVE THOSE WITH WHOM YOU HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**”) cannot possibly be a reference to angels!

We have now established that “your fellows” in Psalm 45:7 cannot possibly apply to the angels! So now let’s look at what these verses actually do mean. Let’s look at the context of these verses in Psalm 45.

THE OVERALL PICTURE OF PSALM 45

In verse 1 David laid out the subject he wished to address in this song. Notice:

My heart is inditing a good matter: **I speak of the things which I have made touching the king**: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. (Psalm 45:1)

The expression “touching the king” is today more commonly expressed as “**concerning the king**”, or as “**in reference to the king**”. So David at the start of this psalm tells us that he is going to speak about things that apply **when Jesus Christ will be king**. The questioner quoted at the start of this article correctly stated, “this is **obviously** referring to Christ”. This means that we need to look for an application of many of the statements in this psalm to the time when Jesus Christ will be crowned as a king. That time is still future.

As is the case in many other psalms, this psalm also contains a number of prophetic statements, statements that would only be fulfilled at a time in the future, long after David wrote this psalm.

Now David himself was a king, the king of the nation of Israel. And when David in the psalms referred to someone else as “the King”, then he was invariably speaking about Jesus Christ. And so this psalm is also obviously speaking about Jesus Christ.

Let’s now examine verses 6 & 7 together. Here they are:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore **God, thy God**, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness **above thy fellows** (above those with whom You have a close relationship). (Psalm 45:6-7)

Let's note the following points.

- 1) These two verses are **speaking about** the individual who is in verse 1 identified as **"the King"**! This is confirmed by the opening reference to **"Your throne"**.
 - 2) All **three occurrences** of the word "God" in these two verses are a translation of the Hebrew word **"Elohim"**.
 - 3) The words "O God" are a translation of the **vocative case** of "Elohim". This is the form of **direct address**, the form in which personal names would typically, though by no means exclusively be used.
 - 4) David here clearly refers to **this King** as **GOD!**
 - 5) This King, who is a God, has **an everlasting throne**.
 - 6) The expression **"God, Your God, has anointed You"** makes clear that there is **another Being called "God"**! It also shows that this other Being called "God" is of a **higher authority** than the King who is called "God", because this other "God" has the power and authority to anoint (i.e. to appoint) this King to His position.
 - 7) As the questioner has acknowledged, these verses **obviously** refer to **Jesus Christ**.
 - 8) This means that in **verse 6** Jesus Christ is also **obviously** addressed as **"God"**.
 - 9) And then verse 7 shows that Jesus Christ, who is identified as "O God", in turn has "a God" over Him who has the power to confer a high position upon Jesus Christ.
 - 10) So these two verses are clearly speaking about **two God Beings**, One of Whom is in authority over The Other One. The One in authority over **Jesus Christ** is **God the Father**.
 - 11) The Father is shown placing Jesus Christ above those with whom Jesus Christ has a **close relationship**. That is a reference to **those** who will be **in the first resurrection**.
 - 12) This **"close relationship"** is a reference to those in the first resurrection becoming **"the Bride" of Jesus Christ**. Christ will always be "above" those in the first resurrection. The "close relationship" is a reference to **"the marriage relationship"** (Revelation 19:7).
- In this regard the translation **"Your fellows" is very misleading**, because we don't tend to think of "a very close bond" when we today use the word "fellows". It's not really speaking about "fellows" at all. The meaning of the Hebrew word "chaber" is quite clear and unambiguous. And there will be only a very limited number of individuals who will ever be "in a very close relationship with Jesus Christ". Don't be misled by the ambiguous translation "your fellows"!
- 13) Verse 1 told us that these things will apply **when Jesus Christ becomes King**. So verses 6-7 refer to a time that is yet future! These verses have thus far never yet been fulfilled. They will see their fulfillment **at the time of the first resurrection**.

14) Being anointed "ABOVE" those with whom He has a very close relationship is another way of saying that Jesus Christ will be anointed as "**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**" (Revelation 19:16). He is anointed above all other kings. He is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). That's a much closer relationship than any relationship with angels that might be construed.

15) Being anointed "**with the oil of gladness**" shows that this takes place at the time of the first resurrection and not before then. Gladness and rejoicing are key ingredients of the marriage supper and the coronation ceremony at that time.

And that's about all that needs explaining about Psalm 45:7.

Frank W. Nelte