

PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Leader's Guide, Lesson Ten

PSALMS 45 AND 102

The Son's Eternal Throne

Lesson at a glance

This is the deity-of-Christ lesson, and it is built on the frame that Hebrews 1 supplies: a chain of seven Old Testament quotations arguing that the Son is superior to angels. Two of those quotations are the psalms in front of you. Psalm 45 is a wedding song written for the marriage of an Israelite king, and its sixth verse addresses the bridegroom as "God," with a throne that lasts forever and a scepter of uprightness; Hebrews 1:8 to 9 says God spoke those words to the Son. Psalm 102 is the prayer of an anonymous sick and lonely man, and its closing verses praise the LORD as the Creator who remains unchanged while heaven and earth wear out like a garment; Hebrews 1:10 to 12 addresses those words to the Son as well. The lesson works through both psalms in their own settings first, honestly, and only then follows Hebrews. It also asks the class the hardest version of the prophecy-and-type question this series has been teaching since Lesson One: how can a song written for a real wedding in Jerusalem be spoken to Jesus? Aim for wonder, not for argument. If the class leaves quieter than it came in, you have taught it well.

Goals for this session

First, that each person would read both psalms honestly in their own settings, a royal wedding and a sick man's prayer, before hearing what the New Testament does with them.

Second, that the class would follow the argument of Hebrews 1 as an argument, seeing the contrast between what God says of angels and what He says to the Son, and would understand why the writer bothers to make it.

Third, that everyone would see plainly from Hebrews 1:8 to 12 that the New Testament addresses the Son as God and as the Creator, and would learn to say both that the Son is fully divine and that the Son is not the Father, without going one step past what Scripture says.

Fourth, that the class would take the "therefore" of Hebrews 2:1 personally, and would leave with their confidence resting on the One whose years have no end rather than on the garment that is going to be folded up.

Preparing to lead

Read Psalm 45 and Psalm 102 out loud, all the way through, more than once, before you look at a single New Testament passage. This lesson will collapse into proof-texting if you arrive knowing only the two quoted paragraphs. Read Psalm 102:1 to 11 slowly enough to feel it; the man in it is not a theological device, he is somebody's neighbor.

Read Hebrews 1 and 2 together at one sitting, and look up all seven quotations in their original places: Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 104:4, Psalm 45:6 to 7, Psalm 102:25 to 27, and Psalm 110:1. Reading each one where it lives will show you the shape of the writer's argument better than any commentary will, and it will let you answer the question someone always asks about where a quotation came from.

Pray before you teach this one, and pray differently than usual. You are going to spend an hour on the highest subject in Scripture with people you know by name, and the temptation for a teacher here is to enjoy being the one who explains it. Ask God to keep you small. Pray also for anyone in your class who is ill, isolated, or worn down, because Psalm 102 was written for them and they should not leave the room without knowing it.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

People who have been taught that the Son is a created being. Some in your class have had this conversation, and some have relatives or neighbors who hold the view sincerely. Do not name groups and do not run a rebuttal. Read Hebrews 1:10 to 12 aloud, ask the class who the psalm was originally addressed to, and let the text do the work. A class that has watched the writer of Hebrews address the Creator of heaven and earth as the Son does not need to be argued into anything, and will be far kinder to their relatives on Monday for having been taught gently on Sunday.

Going further than Scripture goes. When a class is excited, someone will start speculating about how the Father and the Son relate, or will reach for an analogy involving water or eggs or shells. Analogies of this kind almost always end up teaching something false. Say kindly that Scripture nowhere gives us a diagram, that it gives us statements to believe and a Person to worship, and that our business is to say what it says and stop where it stops. Hebrews 1:8 to 9 is the model: the Son is addressed as God in one verse, and God is called His God in the next, and the writer does not explain it. Neither should we.

Depression, chronic illness, and loneliness. Psalm 102:1 to 11 is one of the most accurate descriptions of despair in Scripture: sleeplessness, loss of appetite, wasting away, being mocked, feeling that God Himself has picked you up and thrown you down. Somebody in your room is living in those verses right now. Do not rush them. Do not fix them. Read them out loud, note that God put this prayer in His own songbook without even naming the man who prayed it, and point out verse 17, that He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise it. The Optional Application in this lesson exists for exactly this reason; encourage the class to actually do it.

The bride in Psalm 45. Two things may unsettle readers. Verse 10 tells the bride to forget her people and her father's house, which sounds cold to modern ears but describes an ordinary ancient marriage, most likely of a foreign princess joining an Israelite royal house. And the court described in verses 9 and 15 is a real royal court with all that implies. Scripture often describes what it does not commend, and Israel's kings are a long lesson in that. Do not spend the hour there, but do not pretend the psalm is not what it is. The lesson also warns the class not to claim more for verses 10 to 17 than Scripture claims, since the New Testament never applies them to the church; the bride-of-Christ teaching stands on Ephesians 5, 2 Corinthians 11:2, and Revelation 19 in their own right.

Angels. This lesson is about the Son's superiority to angels, and the subject brings out sentimental ideas: that people become angels when they die, that everyone has a personal angel who arranges parking spaces, and so on. Hebrews 1:7 and 1:14 give you all the correction you need, and they give it positively. Angels are made, they are spirits, they are servants, and they are sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation. That is a high and good calling, and it is not what the Son is. Keep the emphasis where Hebrews keeps it.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Hebrews 1:1 to 4 aloud, and then Psalm 102:25 to 27, and let the class sit with the two of them together before you say anything.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask which sentence in Hebrews 1:1 to 4 is hardest to take in, collect three or four answers, and write them where everyone can see them.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 3 (the seven quotations and the shape of the argument), 5 (the throne and the scepter of Psalm 45:6 to 7), 11 (Hebrews applying the wedding song to the Son, including the prophecy and type question in 11b), and 12 (Hebrews applying the Creator psalm to the Son). If time runs out, protect 11 and 12. Question 8 should be read aloud and felt even if the discussion has to be brief, because it is the pastoral heart of the hour.

Notes on key questions

Question 2. Hebrews 1:1 to 4 makes at least seven claims about the Son, and it is worth counting them with the class on a board: He is the one by whom God has spoken in these last days, He is appointed heir of all things, the world was made through Him, He is the radiance of God's glory, He is the exact imprint

of God's nature, He upholds the universe by the word of His power, He made purification for sins, and He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The phrase "exact imprint of his nature" translates a Greek word used of the impression a seal leaves in wax or a die leaves on a coin. On the present tense of "upholds," this is not a God who wound the world up and stepped back; the universe is being carried, right now, by the Son. Connect the last clause back to Lesson Eight and Psalm 110:1: He sat down, because the work was finished.

Question 3. The seven quotations in Hebrews 1:5 to 13 are Psalm 2:7 (verse 5), 2 Samuel 7:14 (verse 5), Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Greek Old Testament and compare Psalm 97:7 (verse 6), Psalm 104:4 (verse 7), Psalm 45:6 to 7 (verses 8 and 9), Psalm 102:25 to 27 (verses 10 to 12), and Psalm 110:1 (verse 13). Two of them concern angels, in verses 6 and 7, and five concern the Son. The class will recognize Psalm 2 from Lesson One and Psalm 110 from Lesson Eight, and it is worth saying out loud that this series has already worked through the first and last links in the chain. The argument's spine is a contrast in what God says: of the angels He says they are made and sent, but to the Son He says "Your throne, O God" and "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth." Point out the little formula the writer repeats, "to which of the angels did God ever say," in verses 5 and 13. The answer both times is none, ever.

Question 5. Psalm 45:6 to 7 says the throne is forever and ever, that the scepter of this kingdom is a scepter of uprightness, and that the king has loved righteousness and hated wickedness. A scepter is the symbol of the right to rule, and a crooked scepter was a stock image for a corrupt reign, so this is a promise about the character of the government and not only its length. Verse 7 then says, "Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." Let the class notice the strangeness of it without hurrying to smooth it out: the one addressed as God in verse 6 has a God in verse 7. That tension is not a flaw; it is a signpost, and Hebrews quotes both verses together on purpose. On the word "anointed," the Hebrew verb is the one behind Messiah and the Greek verb is the one behind Christ. The oil of gladness is festal anointing, the oil of a celebration rather than of a coronation only. If someone objects that the Old Testament sometimes uses the word "gods" of human judges, and therefore verse 6 need mean nothing special, they are thinking of Psalm 82:6, which Jesus Himself cites in John 10:34 to 35. That is a fair thing to raise and a fair thing to answer. Psalm 82 addresses a group of unjust judges and tells them in the very next verse that they will die like men, which is the opposite of an everlasting throne. Psalm 45:6 addresses one person, gives him a throne forever and ever, and Hebrews reports that God spoke the words to His Son.

Question 6. Verses 8 and 9 describe a real royal court: perfumed robes, ivory rooms, foreign princesses, a queen standing at the king's right hand. Verses 16 and 17 promise the king sons who will be princes in all the earth and a name remembered in every generation, with nations praising him forever and ever. The point of the question is the list the class builds in part b. A throne that is forever and ever, a name remembered in all generations, praise from the nations that never ends, and above all the address "O God" in verse 6, cannot honestly be said of any man who is buried in Jerusalem. Every king this could have been written for is dust. Draw the same conclusion the class drew about Psalm 22 in Lesson Four: the Spirit gave a poet words that fit the occasion and fit, far more exactly, someone the poet never saw.

Question 8. Psalm 102:1 to 11 gives at least eight images: days passing like smoke, bones burning like a furnace, a heart struck down and withered like grass, forgetting to eat, bones clinging to flesh, a desert owl among ruins, a lonely sparrow on a housetop, ashes for bread and tears in the cup, and days like an evening shadow. Ask which one lands hardest and be prepared for the room to go quiet; the sparrow on the housetop usually does it, because it is not a bird in a cage but a bird alone on a roof in the middle of a crowded city. On verse 10, he says God has taken him up and thrown him down. Do not correct him. The important thing is the preposition: he says it to God. That is what the psalms teach God's people to do with the part of their suffering that they cannot explain, and it is the same lesson the class learned from Psalm 22:1 in Lesson Four.

Question 11. In Hebrews 1:8 to 9 the speaker is God the Father, and the one addressed is the Son, and in verse 8 the Son is addressed as God. Make sure the class sees the framing words, "But of the Son he says," because they are the whole point: the writer is not comparing Jesus to a psalm, he is reporting what God said and to whom. Part b is the hardest question in the lesson and you should not resolve it too quickly. The honest answer is that Psalm 45 is not a prediction in the way Micah 5:2 is a prediction. It is a real wedding song for a real king, and its language about that king overflows anything a son of David could hold, so that the psalm is filled up completely only in the King it was always straining toward. That is the pattern the class has met over and over in this series: David was an anointed king, Jesus is the Anointed King. Say plainly that the New Testament's use is not a stretch imposed on the psalm; the psalm itself said more than the wedding could contain, and Hebrews tells us on God's authority who the words belong to.

Question 12. In Psalm 102 the one addressed is the LORD, the covenant God of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth. In Hebrews 1:10 to 12 the one addressed is the Son. There is no softer way to say what that means, and you should not look for one. Three things in these verses cannot be said of any created being: He laid the foundation of the earth and made the heavens; He remains while creation perishes; and He is the same, with years that have no end. Compare Hebrews 1:2, John 1:1 to 3, Colossians 1:16 to 17, and 1 Corinthians 8:6, all of which say that creation came about through the Son. Then read Hebrews 13:8 and let the class find the line of the psalm it is standing on, which is Psalm 102:27, "but you are the same, and your years have no end." Malachi 3:6 says the same of the LORD. Some in the class will be seeing for the first time that the unchangeableness of God is claimed for Jesus by name. Let it land, and then pray.

Question 13. John 1:1 to 3 says the Word was in the beginning with God, was God, and that all things were made through Him; verse 14 says that Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Colossians 1:15 to 17 says all things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him, that He is before all things, and that in Him all things hold together. John 20:28 gives us Thomas addressing the risen Jesus as "My Lord and my God," and Jesus accepting it. All of these run in exactly the same channel as Hebrews 1:10 to 12. On part b: the writer of Hebrews names drifting rather than rebelling because drifting is what actually happens to people. Nobody plans it. A boat that is not tied slowly leaves the dock, and the danger is precisely that the movement is not noticed. Ask the class what drifting looks like in practice, and expect honest answers about missed assemblies, prayer that quietly stopped, and a Bible that has not been opened at

home in months. This is the same warning the class studied in Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3 and 4 in Lesson Seven, and it is worth saying so.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson Ten, and both are about handling the text honestly. Comparing Translations on a Difficult Line uses Psalm 45:6, which good translators have rendered in more than one way. The habit being taught is not doubt; it is the confidence to read a footnote, ask whether any doctrine hangs on the difference, and then ask whether the New Testament has already settled the matter, which in this case it has. If you can, bring two or three different translations to class and pass them around so people can see the footnote with their own eyes. The second skill, Reading the Greek Old Testament the Apostles Quoted, explains why a New Testament quotation sometimes does not match the Old Testament wording in our Bibles. Keep this practical and unalarming. The class has already met the same thing in Lesson Five with Hebrews 10:5, and the point to make is that a New Testament writer's choice of wording is itself inspired and is usually the exact place where his argument is being made.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, we hardly know how to pray after an hour like this one. You have told us that the Son through whom You made the world is the same Son who made purification for our sins and sat down at Your right hand. You addressed Him as God. You told Him that He laid the foundation of the earth and that when it wears out like a coat He will still be exactly Himself. Forgive us for how small we have made Him, and for how easily we drift from words like these. Thank You that He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise it. Thank You that His throne is forever and ever and His scepter is never crooked. Steady our hearts on the One whose years have no end. In His name we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson Eleven

Next week is Psalms 34 and 41, the protected one and the betrayed one. Psalm 34 comes out of one of the strangest episodes in David's life, when he escaped a foreign king by pretending to be insane, and it contains the line John quotes at the cross: "he keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken." Peter reaches for the same psalm twice in his first letter. Psalm 41 contains a sentence about a friend who ate at the psalmist's table and then lifted his heel against him, and Jesus quoted it in the upper room about Judas, with Judas in the room. Ask the class to read both psalms in full, and to read 1 Samuel 21:10 to 15 for the background to Psalm 34, John 13:18 to 30, and Acts 1:15 to 26. Tell them to notice, as they read, how Jesus treated the man who betrayed Him right up to the last hour.