

Psalm 101: Good Government



Psalm 101 (100) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

The king promises God to govern with justice. Psalm 99 acknowledges the Lord as a God of Justice: 'Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob'(Psalm 99:4).

Psalm 100 celebrates the fact that God's justice is eternal: 'The Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations'(Psalm 100:5) In Psalm 101 the psalmist declares that this exercise of justice is realised through the governing of the king.

‘When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes’(Deuteronomy 17:18-19).

The focus in Psalm 101 is on avoiding ministers who are arrogant, ambitious and greedy.

‘A king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule with justice’(Isaiah 32:1).

‘A wise king winnows the wicked’(Proverbs 20:26).

‘Take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.’

(Proverbs 25:5)

‘If a ruler listens to falsehood,
all his officials will be wicked’(Proverbs 29:12).

‘As a judge is, so are his officials; as the ruler of a city is,
so are all its inhabitants’(Sirach 10:2).

In the biblical record most of the kings of Judah were judged to be failures:

‘Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them were great sinners, for they abandoned the law of the Most High. The kings of Judah came to an end’(Sirach 49:4).

I sing of kindness and right judgment.

What does the Lord require of you but to make right judgments, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?(Micah 6:8)

‘Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with fairness (en epieikeia) and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind’(Wisdom 12:18-19).

The Greek *epieikeia* is a basic quality expected on one who pronounces judgment. It is translated 'fairness' in the above texts. In the following texts from the New Testament it is translated as 'gentle.'

'Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near'(Philippians 4:5).

'Be gentle and show every courtesy to everyone'(Titus 3:2).

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy'(James 3:17).

Epieikeia is the wise application of the law by a judge who takes all circumstances into consideration and exercises justice with compassion and loving kindness.

‘Loving kindness and faithfulness preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by loving kindness.’

(Proverbs 20:28)

To you, O Lord, I make music.

David was a musician (1Samuel 16:14-23; 1Chronicles 15-16,25).

I live the truth I sing,

as I come before you.

I show my royal household

how to live a perfect life.

I do not admire

anything without honour.

I hate the ways of the wicked.

They will never attach themselves to me.

Perverseness of heart will be far from me.

I want nothing to do with evil.

I silence anyone who secretly slanders a neighbour.
I do not tolerate a haughty look or an arrogant heart.
I look with favour on the faithful in the land.
Only they will share my palace.

Only those whose lives are upright
have a place in my service.

The king is declaring the kind of person he wants as
his ministers.

‘It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the
throne is established by righteousness’(Proverbs 16:12).

Jesus Ben Sirach has the following advice for those seeking counsel:

‘All counsellors praise the counsel they give, but some give counsel in their own interest. Be wary of a counsellor, and learn first what is his interest, for he will take thought for himself. He may cast the lot against you and tell you, ‘Your way is good,’ and then stand aside to see what happens to you. Do not consult the one who regards you with suspicion; hide your intentions from those who are jealous of you’(Sirach 37:7-10).

No one who practises fraud
shall remain in my house.

No one who utters lies
shall continue in my presence.

Morning by morning
I put down the wicked in the land,
excluding all who do evil
from the city of the Lord.

Morning is the time for exercise of justice in the public square near the city gate.

‘O house of David! Thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn, with no one to quench it, because of your evil doings’(Jeremiah 21:12).

‘Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?’(Job 38:12-13).