



music to your ears

psalm 101

text

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- <sup>1</sup> A hymn belonging to Dāwid
- Permit me to laud<sup>1</sup> fidelity<sup>2</sup> and good governance.<sup>3</sup>  
Let me, YHWH, speak what is music to your ears<sup>4</sup>.
- <sup>2</sup> I intend to devote myself<sup>5</sup> to sound<sup>6</sup> policy.<sup>7</sup>  
So, when will you come<sup>8</sup> to me?  
I will act out of pure motivations<sup>9</sup>  
toward those under my governance.<sup>10</sup>
- <sup>3</sup> I will never allow harmful counsel<sup>11</sup>  
to have a settled place in my administration.<sup>12</sup>  
I will refuse<sup>13</sup> to act out of deception.<sup>14</sup>  
Such conduct will never be associated with<sup>15</sup> me.
- <sup>4</sup> Perverse desires<sup>16</sup> will be absent from me.  
I will countenance<sup>17</sup> no evilly harmful<sup>18</sup> thing.
- <sup>5</sup> He who covertly slanders<sup>19</sup> his fellow citizen,  
I will totally silence.<sup>20</sup>  
The arrogant<sup>21</sup> and over-confident,<sup>22</sup>  
I will never empower.
- <sup>6</sup> I will keep an eye out for<sup>23</sup> honest citizens;<sup>24</sup>  
they it is who will govern<sup>25</sup> with me.  
He who acts honestly;<sup>26</sup>  
he it is who will serve with me.
- <sup>7</sup> They will not remain in my administration,<sup>27</sup>  
who act deceitfully.<sup>28</sup>  
One who counsels<sup>29</sup> deceptions  
will never be allowed a place in my governance.<sup>30</sup>
- <sup>8</sup> First thing,<sup>31</sup> I will put an end to all unjust citizens;<sup>32</sup>  
eradicate from YHWH's city  
all who exercise power wrongfully.<sup>33</sup>

By now, my love and appreciation for the Psalms is well-known to those who visit this site. There is good reason to accept Luther's judgement concerning the Book of Psalms. He suggested that it might be "called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to its encompassing doctrinal content, another of the book's strengths is that no matter how distant the reader may be from its origin, it remains, almost miraculously, so readily available for personal application. This, it seems, is particularly true of the King James Bible with its lovely style of translation. While the KJV makes personal application of the Psalms easy, it also, at times, obscures original applications and settings of individual psalms. Psalm 101 is a classic example of the strengths and weaknesses of the KJV's translation of the Psalms.

With the KJV's "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart," and "I will not know a wicked person," an individual can apply the psalm to their private life and commit themselves to a life of personal integrity. The world might be a better place for it. However, the Psalm's original and near certain public *sitz-im-leben* is largely obscured for the casual, devotional reader.

The original speaker in Psalm 101 is certainly a Jewish king. The setting is public and royal. In the psalm, a king commits himself publicly to principles of good governance. Therefore, as useful and beneficial as the psalm is for effecting personal application and private behavior, it is even more applicable to matters of public policy and governance. This Psalm can serve both the political figure who would lead, and the private citizen who must make choice of candidates. Political figures and the modern electorate can be held to account by how closely they adhere to the principles found in this psalm.

The specific commitments to good governance that the king makes in this psalm are high and virtuous. Even a cursory reading of the Hebrew Bible reveals that few if any of Israel's or

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works, 35:254

Judah's kings lived up to the high ideals found in this psalm. The Hebrew Bible is a testament to the fact that both kings and the nation's citizenry were measured by such "standards" as are found in this psalm and that they paid a high price for their deviancy.

Notwithstanding these past failings, the ideals expressed, and commitments made in this psalm are as valid, even mandatory, today as they were then for the maintenance of a well-functioning society. In this homily, then, we will not only examine the ancient king's commitment to good governance, but how the principles of good governance can be applied to public policy and good governance in today's world. This Psalm will be used as another of the Bible's many "standards" against which we can measure and judge current public officials', their policies, and their actions, along with those of the electorate. We will measure these modern public officials and the electorate that empower them by this standard, not because we expect said officials and societies to "be Biblical," but because we expect them to be moral.

#### the king's person

We can profitably divide the psalm into two parts. In the first, verses 1-4, we hear the king's expectations of himself and the commitment he makes to fulfill them. In the second part, verse 5-8, we hear the king's expectations and commitments for his administration and its necessary officialdom. He will expect all who work in his administration to be guided and judged by the same divine standards as himself.

The king shares his expectations with and makes commitments directly to Yahweh. The king knows exactly what Yahweh wants and expects. The king commits himself to complying with Yahweh's wishes and expectations.

"Permit me to laud fidelity and good governance.

Let me, YHWH, speak what is music to your ears."

Among the commitments that the king, himself, makes are the following. He will show fidelity to the citizenry—and thus to God, Himself. He will have purity of motivation, soundness and honesty in action. In governing, he will subjugate all personal desires and stifle all self-aggrandizement. The king promises that he will shun and exorcise every thought, intention, or action that might do harm to the nation as a whole or any of its private citizens.

The king knows that the famous adage is true: “the buck stops here.” He knows that he sets the tone; that his administration will take on the aspects of his character. Indeed, generations to come can take on the aspects of his character. No one says it any better than the Book of Mormon’s Mosiah II.

“For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed.... Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people.”<sup>2</sup>

Here, we wish to call to mind a refrain that we hear over and over in the histories of the Hebrew Bible. Notwithstanding its ubiquity, the refrains import is too often lost on us.

Rehoboam “did evil”<sup>3</sup>

Abijam “walked in all the sins of his father [Rehoboam].”<sup>4</sup>

Ahaziah “did evil in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab, for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab.”<sup>5</sup>

God “shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mosiah 29.<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 1 Chronicles 12.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 15.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 2 Kings 8.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 14.<sup>16</sup>

Nadab “did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father [Jeroboam], and in his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin.”<sup>7</sup>

Baasha “did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.”<sup>8</sup>

Omri “walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin...”<sup>9</sup>

Ahaziah “did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father [Ahab]... and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.”<sup>10</sup>

We could keep going, but you get the point. Kings/political leaders set precedents. Those precedents are followed by those in the respective administrations and by populations at large. So, the king who speaks in Psalm 101 commits himself to good governance both for the good of those he governs and those who officiate in his administration.

#### The king's administration

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Having committed his royal self to divine principles of good governance, the king turns his attention to his administration and the government officials who surround him. In verses 5-8, he commits himself to assuring that those who serve in his administration abide by the same divine principles of good governance to which he has committed himself personally.

The king will demand that civil servants exercise their power in government with humility, honesty, and justice. Arrogance and self-serving will not be tolerated. Official's counsel in recommending public policy and governmental actions must be based on honest and open reasoning. There must be no deception in their giving of counsel or in their dealings with

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 14.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 15.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 16.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 22.<sup>52</sup>

citizens. Officials must not attempt to advance themselves or their interests through slandering others. The king will constantly be on the lookout for the most honest citizens, whom he will then recruit into his service. Any public official who will not abide by the divine principles of good governance will immediately be removed from office and lose all power to influence policy or harmfully effect the individual citizen.

### Application for today

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Perhaps the reader has grown weary of my repetitiveness on this point. If so, I apologize. But I must say it once more. There was a time—a pre-2016 time—when I, having arrived at this stage of the homily, would have written a conclusion and been done with it. In my mind, I would have hoped that the reader would make direct personal application to his or her private and public life, but I would have refrained from trying to do so for them.

But, that was then, this is now. Everything has changed post-2016. We no longer have the luxury of basking in the wisdom of scripture while avoiding the, at times, painful introspection that scripture demands. We must, both for self and society, boldly hold the mirror of scripture up to our faces and confront head on the reflection we see there. We must, as God has always intended, allow the word of God to read us, rather than settling for our simply reading it.

“... the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”<sup>11</sup>

So, what does God see when he looks into the heart of our society? How does scripture read us? And what do we see when we look into the mirror of Psalm 101? I will answer these questions with more questions. I only ask that the reader be honest.

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<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 4.<sup>12-13</sup>

How does the occupant of the White House—the man I refuse to call by any name other than the appropriate, Caligula—how does he measure up to the standard established by God and expressed by the Jewish King in Psalm 101?

Has he “devoted himself to sound policy”?

No! How sound were his coronavirus policies in the early stages of the pandemic? How many citizens will physically die because of his self-concerned deceptions?

Does he act out of “pure motives”? Does he give a thought to anyone other than himself? Is he motivated by anything other than self-aggrandizement—he who seems most interested in trumpeting the fact that his press briefings have been getting higher Nielsen ratings as of late than the season finale of “the Bachelor,” while being wholly uninterested in comforting those who are anxiety laden over the pandemic and mourn the loss of loved ones?

No!

Does he “allow harmful counsel” to have a “settled place” in his administration?

Yes! Having welcome the counsel of hateful white nationalist racists in his administration, what kind of harm—life-time psychological damage at a minimum—has he perpetrated upon innocent refugee children fleeing murder, rape, and pillage? How many of their parents has he sent back home to be murdered, never to see or be seen again by grieving children?

Need I ask about his relationship with the truth?

No! There is no question. It is non-existent. With every breath he takes, he “acts out of deception.” However many citizens the virus may sicken and kill as a result of Caligula’s initial deceptions about its dangers, far, far more have already been sickened, some mortally, by his poor example of incessant lying. “How much iniquity doth one wicked [president] cause to be committed”!

And what of his administration? How does it measure up to the Lord's standard of good governance as depicted in Psalm 101? Has Caligula made any attempt to find, recruit, and enlist honest individuals in his government?

No! Rather, he has banished one honest public servant after another from his administration. Truth telling is a death sentence for anyone "serving" ("devouring" would be more apt) in this putrid and corrupt administration. Those with whom he does not catch up, leave of their own volition in droves, unwilling to dirty themselves in the filthy mire he scatters and spews everywhere.

Has Caligula made any attempt to find and root out dishonest individuals from his government? Have those in his administration put aside their self-interests to serve the public?

No! His is an administration, not of the swamp, but of the cesspool. It is, hands down, the most corrupt administration in America's long history of corruption. It is a veritable cornucopia of secret combinations, sacrificing the good of the whole for the selfish interest of a few. Dishonesty is rewarded, often with commutations of guilty verdicts and the just punishments that the guilty deserve.

We could go on for pages and pages—I have done so all over the pages of this site. But the facts are undeniable. There is no way that Caligula, his administration, or, for that matter, the nation he further pollutes measures up to the divine standard of good governance as found in Psalm 101. It is not even close. Not by a long-shot.

No! No! And NO!

Sadly, the very people who should know it best—"Christians" of Bible thumping fame—have dove into Caligula's cesspool head first, eyes wide open, mouths drinking and spewing his filth.



The Book of Psalms is a most extraordinary book. Its devotion to God is limitless. Its ability to speak to the hopes and fears of men and women of all ages and eras is immense. Tens of millions, hundreds of millions, perhaps billions—including the greatest of all, the Lord Jesus Christ—have found its words making their way into their own heart-felt prayers as they have sought to know God and invite him to minister in their individual lives.

In our wise use of the Book of Psalms for these important, nay essential devotional purposes, we have sometimes overlooked the profound insights it provides into private and public morality. It has much to say about such matters. In this homily, we have looked at one psalm, the one hundred and first.

In it, we have witnessed an ancient Jewish king's bold act of faith in God as he committed himself and his administration to godly principles of good governance. After briefly cataloging and examining these divine principles, we have, all too briefly, held the mirror of scripture up to ourselves, our nation, and our nation's leaders, and asked, "What do you see?" "Do we, does it, does he measure up to the Lord's standards of good governance?"

To say that the only possible honest answer—a resounding, "No!"—is disheartening is an understatement of epic proportions. Our deviancy from divine standards approaches suicidal. This is all the more so given the nation's long and storied history of priding itself as a "Christian" nation. The deviancy, then, with scripture looking us directly in the eye, takes on the air of blasphemy; society's suicidal rush to destruction: apocalyptic. Indeed,

“...it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.”<sup>12</sup>

If such deviancy does not produce in us tears of sorrow and broken hearts yearning for repentance, it certainly brings tears to a heart-broken God.

“How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her

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<sup>12</sup> Revelation 13.<sup>7</sup>

chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”<sup>13</sup>

“For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt;  
I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.  
Is there no balm in Gilead;  
is there no physician there?  
Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people  
recovered?  
Oh that my head were waters,  
And mine eyes a fountain of tears,  
that I might weep day and night  
for the slain of the daughter of my people!”<sup>14</sup>

*“O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people?  
O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities.  
For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.  
O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful;  
wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ.  
O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength,  
that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me,  
because of the iniquity of this people.”*<sup>15</sup>

*“O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth;  
O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.  
Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth:  
render a reward to the proud.  
LORD, how long shall the wicked,  
how long shall the wicked triumph?  
How long shall they utter and speak hard things?  
and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?*

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 23.<sup>37-38</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 8.<sup>21-9.1</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Alma 31.<sup>30-31</sup>

*They break in pieces thy people, O LORD,  
and afflict thine heritage”<sup>16</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> This is Hebrew *šîr I*. It certainly means “to sing.” There is no doubt in the ancient world important statements, whether sacred or secular (if, indeed, a secular existed anciently) were put to music and sang. However, song is not a commonly used means of making important public statements today. For this reason, I have tried to “bring the text up to date” with my “laud,” which was often the purpose of song in the ancient world. Song heightened and enhanced the import and power of mere human words.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew, *ḥesed II*.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew, *mišpāt*.

<sup>4</sup> This is simply Hebrew, *zāmar I*, “to sing.” With my translation, I have attempted to capture for a modern audience what I think is the speaker’s hope in singing.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew, *śākal I*, in the Hiphil.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew, *tāmîm*.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew, *b<sup>e</sup>derek tāmîm*.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrew, *bô’*. Some have suggested that the king is undergoing a ritualistic “ordeal.” So, here, the king is waiting for God to relieve him from the ordeal due to his promises of and commitment to a just reign. See, for example, John Eaton’s *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation*, p. 351

<sup>9</sup> Literally, “heart.”

<sup>10</sup> This is Hebrew, *beqereb bêît*, “in/into the midst of my house.” Here I understand “house” as “dynasty,” or “rule.” Now, one can have the speaker acting “with a sound mind in his house.” But it seems to me the speaker here is speaking as a public rather than private individual. What he does in the “privacy of his home/courts” impacts all citizens.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrew, *deḅar-belîya ‘al*. I have taken *dāḅar*, word, as counsel that is heard in the king’s court, whether it be that of official or suppliant. As to the infamous, *belîya ‘al*, it’s exact meaning is, to this day, a mystery. That being such is negative and that such a being is harmful is not in doubt. The following lines of poetry are, perhaps, more helpful in determining the meaning of the word in the present context than any lexical analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Literally, “in front of my eyes.” I understand this to be the royal court that rest before the enthroned king on. The royal court is the place of governance; the place from whence the king and his counselors establish and administer governmental policy.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew, *śānē’*, “to hate.”

<sup>14</sup> This is Hebrew, *śēṭ*, from the verb, *śûṭ*. The noun occurs only here and at Hosea 5.2, where it is used of civic leaders, sacred and secular, who ensnare their subjects through misdeeds. The *LXX* translates *parabasis*, a transgression, aberration, deviation from the proper, overstep. The Hebrew seems to be something like “swerve.” According to *TWOT*, the word possesses an “underlying idea of cunningness.”

<sup>15</sup> Hebrew, *dābaq*. It means to cling to, stick to, join, attach to, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Literally, “heart,” or “will.”

<sup>17</sup> Literally, “know.”

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 94.<sup>1-5</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrew, *ra' I*.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, “tongues,” likely something akin to, “wag the tongue at.”

<sup>20</sup> This is Hebrew, *šāmat*. The silence is total and permanent.

<sup>21</sup> Literally, “one with uplifted eyes.” We all familiar with the upraised eyebrow of the smug and arrogant as they put another in their place with a demeaning quip. Perhaps the Psalmist has this in mind. Also possible, the idea may be of one who in their arrogant confidence is always looking boldly into other’s eyes—a sign of lauded confidence in our culture, but not so lauded in many.

<sup>22</sup> This is literally, “open hearted.”

<sup>23</sup> Literally, “my eyes will be upon...”

<sup>24</sup> Hebrew, *b<sup>e</sup>n<sup>e</sup>’emnê-’ereš*.

<sup>25</sup> Literally, “sit.” This “sitting” is not about the simple physical act of setting one’s back side on a chair. Those who “sit” with the king, spend time with the king, converse with the king. They are those who counsel with the king in his governance. The last line of the verse, enhances this understanding of “sitting with the king.”

<sup>26</sup> This is Hebrew, *tāmîm*, again (previously found in verse 2).

<sup>27</sup> This is Hebrew, *beqereb bêṭî*, which we saw previously in verse 2.

<sup>28</sup> Given the meaning of “loose” for the Hebrew word, *remîyâ I*, I admit, it was awfully tempting to translate, “He who is fast and loose with the facts.”

<sup>29</sup> Literally, “speaks.”

<sup>30</sup> Hebrew *l<sup>e</sup>neged’ênâ*. Again, in this instance, to be before the king’s eyes is to be in his presence in some advisory role.

<sup>31</sup> Literally, “at dawn.” One is reminded of the politician’s promise of all he or she will do “in the first 100 days.”

<sup>32</sup> Hebrew, *riš’ê-’āreš*.

<sup>33</sup> Hebrew, *po’lê’āven*. “Although *נָסַח* has no ANE cognates, it appears to derive from the same parent root as *נָסַח* (power, #226). Consequently, *נָסַח* could highlight a negative aspect of power, i.e., the abuse of power that brings harm and destruction” (NIDOTT).