



## Psalm 101 - A Sovereign's Pledge of Integrity and Justice

Of David. A Psalm.

### Introduction

This is a royal psalm, a song about the place that the Davidic monarchy has in God's plan for his people. This psalm sets out, for David and his heirs, the ideal kind of ruler that they should aim to be. The people who sing this will find their desires for their king shaped by it, and will receive guidance for their prayers for the ruling king.

The psalm's 'I' is the Davidic king, in whom the people are included, despite contrary claims: <<*Now a scoundrel named Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and cried out, 'We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse! Everyone to your tents, O Israel!'*>> (2 Samuel 20:1), and: <<*When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, 'What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.'*>> (1 Kings 12:16), and therefore along with whom they sing.

The king's task is his devotion to achieving covenant faithfulness, both in his personal life and in the social life of Israel. As God's people, Israel is called to display the true humanness which is godliness in active operation. The Davidic king should set the pattern for covenant faithfulness, and each Israelite should have the same aims in his own daily life.

In the context of Book 4 (Psalms 90-106), this psalm is already understood to be looking forward to a new David, as confirmed by Psalm 72. So even before Jesus, the psalm must have been understood to describe the Messiah's reign and his requirements. Christians sing this, rejoicing that they have in Jesus the perfect

embodiment of the Davidic ideal; this can lead them to reflect on what kind of people they should aim to be, with such a king. They can further embrace its ideal of leadership in church and state, and seek to honour such leaders when they appear. This is the first psalm attributed to David since Psalm 86; the only other Davidic psalm in Book 4 is Psalm 103.

David was anointed king three times. Samuel anointed David in his boyhood, really as a prophecy of his calling and destiny (1 Samuel 16:13). After Saul's death he was anointed king over the tribe of Judah at Hebron (2 Samuel 2:4). Seven years later he was anointed king over the remaining tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 5:3). Before he took the throne over all Israel, he had a lot of time to think about what kind of king he should be.

### Psalm 101:1-4 - The King Will Aim to Be Blameless.

The song opens by declaring the king's firm commitment to live out covenant faithfulness: he will ponder the way that is blameless: <<*For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God? – the God who girded me with strength, and made my way safe*>> (Psalm 18:31-32), <<*Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord*>> (Psalm 119:1), <<*Crooked minds are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight*>> (Proverbs 11:20), and: <<*Righteousness guards one whose way is upright, but sin overthrows the wicked*>> (Proverbs 13:6), in order to walk in that way; he wants to display integrity of heart within his own house, i.e. in his private life; when it comes to whose advice and help he will seek in ruling, he will also reject those who fall away and those who have a perverse heart, that is, those who are openly unfaithful. The policies and plans of a Davidic king should be focused on serving the people, especially in promoting the conditions in which piety can flourish; unfaithful advisers do not share these goals.

<sup>1</sup> I will sing of loyalty and of justice;  
to you, O Lord, I will sing.

### Psalm 101:1

I will sing of loyalty and of justice. David sang this song exalting the mercy or loyalty and justice or judgement of God. The two go together; mercy can only be properly understood in light of justice. When justice pronounces its righteous penalty, mercy may grant relief. As king, David was concerned with mercy and justice. He knew these principles were not rooted in man, but in God. Before he could exercise mercy and justice in his kingdom, he had to understand and extol the mercy and justice of God. Charles Spurgeon noted, “Mercy and judgment would temper the administration of David, because he had adoringly perceived them in the dispensations of his God.”

To you, O Lord, I will sing. David could only sing of loyalty and justice in reference to songs of praise to Yahweh. David knew that the Lord was the source of all mercy and justice.

<sup>2</sup> I will study the way that is blameless.

When shall I attain it?

I will walk with integrity of heart

within my house;

<sup>3</sup> I will not set before my eyes

anything that is base.

I hate the work of those who fall away;

it shall not cling to me.

<sup>4</sup> Perverseness of heart shall be far from me;

I will know nothing of evil.

#### Psalm 101:2-4

I will study the way that is blameless. David's longing for the Lord was connected to his desire to live a wise and holy life, i.e. the way that is blameless: <<*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless'*>> (Genesis 17:1), <<*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God*>> (Philippians 1:9-11). He determined that his reign would be marked by integrity and godliness. As David came into a position of greater power it was all the more important that he focus more on personal godliness and behave wisely in a perfect way. Power often exposes the flaws of character, if it does not actually help create them.

I will walk with integrity of heart within my house. Before it could be lived in the courts of his kingdom, David's righteous life had to be real in his conduct within his own house, his private life. This was a standard that David only imperfectly lived, much to his own hurt.

I will not set before my eyes anything that is base. David knew that one measure of a righteous life was what one chose to set before the eyes. There are many wicked things to set the eyes upon, and the lust of the eyes is a significant aspect of the lure of this world: <<*for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh,*

*the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world>>* (1 John 2:16). David's words are a reminder of Job's solemn declaration: *<<I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?>>* (Job 31:1). Jesus teaches that lustful looks and thoughts are as much a sin as any resulting actions: *<<But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart>>* (Matthew 5:28), and the apostle concluded: *<<They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!>>* (2 Peter 2:14).

If only David had lived this principle more consistently. Instead David took several wives, according to 2 Samuel 3:2-5 and 5:13, in a seeming inability to restrain his sexual desires, and was led astray by the lust of his eyes when he first saw Bathsheba: *<<It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful>>* (2 Samuel 11:2). Yet, David should not be thought of as a hypocrite because he came to fail in completely living up to these high standards. It is not hypocrisy to have a standard so high that it cannot be completely met. Hypocrisy is when a person has one standard for themselves and a higher standard for others.

I hate the work of those who fall away. David knew he wanted to live a godly life; it was wise to keep some distance from those with a perverse heart: *<<Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers>>* (Psalm 1:1 NIV). He knew what would be later stated by Paul: *<<Bad company ruins good morals>>* (1 Corinthians 15:33b).

I will know nothing of evil. David knew that a righteous life must have some sense of determination about it. Although he did not perfectly fulfil this determination, his life was undeniably godlier with this determination than without it. Perverseness of heart is more deliberate: a twisted mind and will which hate the plain truth and the straight path.

#### Psalm 101:5-8 - The King Will Destroy the Wicked and Favour the Faithful.

The king should promote faithfulness among the people, and this includes protecting the weaker members from those who would do them harm. The king can carry this out in a judicial way against those who break specific laws: when someone slanders his neighbour secretly: *<<You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the Lord>>* (Leviticus 19:16), as this is an attack on the neighbour's life, the king can destroy the wrongdoer by pronouncing sentence against him. There are situations in which the king does not have legal punishment to give, as when someone shows disdain for the covenant and for its people, e.g.

by giving a haughty look and having an arrogant heart or practicing deceit; and yet the faithful king will not endure such people, i.e. he will not pretend that such people are pleasing: <<*When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity*>> (Isaiah 1:12-13), nor will they dwell in his house, i.e. he will not count them as intimate friends. At the same time, the ideal king will look with favour on the faithful in the land: they may dwell with him, and he will rely on them to minister to him. Under this kind of leadership, the city of the Lord can be a happy and holy place, a blessing to the world.

- <sup>5</sup> One who secretly slanders a neighbour  
I will destroy.  
A haughty look and an arrogant heart  
I will not tolerate.

#### Psalm 101:5

One who secretly slanders a neighbour I will destroy. It is a significant and grievous sin to lie or speak in an evil way against another: <<*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*>> (Exodus 20:16). The worst of this slander is done secretly, and David was determined to oppose all who did so. Adam Clarke noted a Chaldean translation of this and its sense: “‘He who speaks with the triple tongue against his neighbour.’ That is, the tongue by which he slays three persons, viz., 1. The man whom he slanders; 2. Him to whom he communicates the slander; and, 3. Himself, the slanderer. Every slanderer has his triple tongue, and by every slander inflicts those three deadly wounds.”

A haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not tolerate. David listed two additional and related sins: the face communicates arrogance and the proud heart behind the haughty look. To all such who thought themselves better than their neighbours, David said “Him I will not tolerate.”

- <sup>6</sup> I will look with favour on the faithful in the land,  
so that they may live with me;  
whoever walks in the way that is blameless  
shall minister to me.
- <sup>7</sup> No one who practises deceit  
shall remain in my house;

no one who utters lies  
shall continue in my presence.

<sup>8</sup> Morning by morning I will destroy  
all the wicked in the land,  
cutting off all evildoers  
from the city of the Lord.

### Psalm 101:6-8

I will look with favour on the faithful in the land. David refused to look to or at those who thought themselves better than others. Instead he looked at the faithful, deciding that they would live with him.

Whoever walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me. The word for minister, Hebrew *sh-r-t*, means ‘serve’ or ‘assist’; e.g. Joshua ‘ministered to’ or ‘assisted’ Moses: <<*So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God*>> (Exodus 24:13), and: <<*Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent*>> (Exodus 33:11). This is the likely sense here, where ‘his officials’ are ‘those ministering to him’. The word also refers to the work of a priest, who ministers to the Lord, for example: <<*At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day*>> (Deuteronomy 10:8), and: <<*As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel*>> (Deuteronomy 17:12), but this does not fit the present context. Perhaps David spoke this as he came to the throne, vowing to find the right people to appoint to his government. He would reject he who practises deceit and he who utters lies. He would look for the humble, not the proud-knowing, for they were much better to trust with authority and responsibility.

Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land. David’s determination to rule in such a way that favoured the godly and opposed the wicked was so fixed that he was determined to do it early. As he ruled in the city of the Lord, the wicked would not prosper.