

Psalms 101:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.

Analysis

I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing. This royal psalm begins David's solemn commitment to righteous rule, likely composed when he became king or during covenant renewal. The opening declaration sets the psalm's theme: balanced governance reflecting God's own character. "I will sing" (ashirah, אָשִׁירָה) appears twice, framing the verse with worship—not merely pledging obedience but celebrating God's attributes he intends to embody.

"Mercy and judgment" (chesed u'mishpat, חֶסֶד וּמִשְׁפָּט) are twin pillars of righteous rule. Chesed (loyal love, steadfast kindness) represents grace, compassion, and covenant faithfulness. Mishpat (justice, judgment) represents legal rectitude, impartial decisions, and moral order. Biblical leadership requires both—neither harsh legalism nor sentimental permissiveness, but grace and truth held in tension (John 1:14, 17).

These attributes characterize God's rule throughout Scripture. He is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6), yet also "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). David, as God's vice-regent, must reflect divine character in governance—showing mercy to the humble while executing judgment on the wicked.

The verse establishes that David's administration will consciously imitate God's rule. His commitment is offered "unto thee, O LORD"—accountable to divine

oversight. Human authority is never autonomous but derivative, answerable to the King of kings.

Historical Context

Psalm 101 is classified as a 'Royal Psalm'—composed by or about Israel's king, reflecting the covenant between God and David's dynasty (2 Samuel 7). David's kingship was meant to model divine rule, with the king as God's representative ensuring justice, protecting the vulnerable, and leading the nation in covenant faithfulness.

Ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions typically featured self-glorifying boasts about military conquests, building projects, and accumulation of wealth. In contrast, David's royal 'inscription' (this psalm) pledges moral integrity, righteous governance, and the exclusion of wickedness from his administration. This reflects Israel's distinct understanding of kingship—kings were under God's law, not above it (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

For post-exilic Israel, this psalm recalled David's ideal reign—contrasting with later kings who abandoned righteousness, accumulated wealth oppressively, and led the nation into idolatry (catalyzing exile). The psalm became eschatological hope—anticipating a future Davidic king who would perfectly fulfill these pledges.

Jesus is that ultimate Davidic King who perfectly balanced mercy and judgment. He showed compassion to sinners while pronouncing woe on hypocrites. His return will bring final justice, vindicating the oppressed and judging wickedness comprehensively.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do leaders today balance mercy (compassion, second chances) with judgment (accountability, consequences) without compromising either?
2. Why does David frame his commitment to righteous rule as worship ('I will sing') rather than mere policy declaration?
3. In what areas of life (parenting, church leadership, workplace authority) do you tend toward mercy at the expense of justice, or vice versa?

Interlinear Text

חֶסֶד	וּמִשְׁפָּט	אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה	לְךָ	יְהוָה	אֶזְמַרְךָ:
of mercy	and judgment	I will sing	H0	unto thee O LORD	will I sing
H2617	H4941	H7891		H3068	H2167

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 89:1 (Sin): I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

Psalms 97:8 (Judgment): Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD.

Psalms 51:14 (Sin): Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

Psalms 145:7 (Sin): They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.