

PSALM READING FOR JULY 19, 2015

START WITH SCRIPTURE: Psalm 89:20-37

OBSERVE:

This Psalm is a perfect companion-piece to 2 Samuel 7:1-14a. The voice is first person, as the Lord affirms his choice of David as his anointed king. He has been anointed with the *sacred oil* reserved for priests, prophets and kings.

The Lord promises victory over his enemies, and the extension of his kingdom: *I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers.*

Using an ancient symbol that connects Israel to its agricultural past, the Lord asserts that *through my name his horn will be exalted*. The horn in Biblical lore is a symbol of strength -- but the true strength comes from the identity of the Lord, as revealed in his name.

The relationship that the Lord establishes with David is unique and intimate:

He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.' And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

David is "adopted" as the firstborn of God, with all of the benefits of power and royalty that involves; but more importantly he will be able to call out to God in God's name.

Then the Lord reiterates the same pledge he has made in 2 Samuel 7:11-14:

*I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail.
I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.*

However, there is also the threat of consequences if David's descendants forsake God's law or fail to keep the commandments -- they will be scourged! However, God has made an inviolable promise to David, to love him and his house forever, and to keep his side of the covenant. Punishment is not correlated with utter abandonment: *his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.*"

APPLY:

David obviously has a unique place in God's heart, and in the hearts of the Israelites as the model, ideal king. But what has that to do with us nearly 3,000 years later?

Quite a lot, actually! We know from the history of the monarchy in Israel and Judah that the united kingdoms consolidated by David didn't last but one generation after his reign. And we know that some of his successors who ruled Judah in Jerusalem were really good, and some were really bad. And we know that the threat included in verses 31-32 did come to pass:

"If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging.

Eventually, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C. It would almost seem that the promise made to David by God for an unending covenant, an unending dynasty, and an eternal throne was broken.

Almost -- but not from a New Testament perspective. Jesus, as the descendant of David, fulfills the Messianic destiny of the Son of David and rules also as the Son of God, as *Lord of lords and King of kings* (Revelation 17:14).

We also hear something that might be a comfort to us: that though we break God's commandments and laws, and receive the due punishment for our sins, God doesn't stop loving us. In fact, it is through the life, death and resurrection of King Jesus that all of God's promises are fulfilled. And all who turn to the Son of David in repentance and faith may become his subjects.

As Jesus says in the Epilogue of Revelation: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star*" (Revelation 22:13,16).

RESPOND:

I have learned to be cautious about idealizing princes, politicians, celebrities, athletes and actors. They have a tendency to disappoint, sometimes devastatingly. But the promises made about the One descendant of David that I really care about have been, are being, and will be fulfilled.

Though times of austerity and even scourging may come, God will not forget his love for us for the sake of his Son. Promises may seem deferred in my short-term field of vision; but in God's long-range vision, his promises are always fulfilled.

Our Lord, your promises sometimes seem to be delayed, and even broken, in my limited scope of vision. But as it has been said in different ways, your promises may come slowly but they bend toward eternal fulfillment. Amen.

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