

## Psalm 51

### "A Prayer for Cleansing"

For the Choir Director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.<sup>1</sup>

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#### **A 1 PRAYER FOR CLEANSING FROM SIN 51:1-2**

##### **B 1 A Request for Gracious Compassion 51:1**

C 1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;<sup>2</sup>

C 2 According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

##### **B 2 A Request for Cleansing 51:2**

C 1 {2} Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity

C 2 And cleanse me from my sin.

#### **A 2 ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GUILT BEFORE A HOLY GOD 51:3-6**

**B 1 Of Personal Sins:** {3} For I know my transgressions, 51:3

**B 2 Of Personal Sin:** And my sin is ever before me.

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<sup>1</sup> Superscription - gone into Bathsheba. David's sin of adultery and cover-up murder is truly abominable. But God graciously worked through Nathan the prophet to bring about repentance, confession, and forgiveness. That is what is truly amazing – that God is in the business of salvaging sinners and making something good and noble out of their lives. The historical background to this psalm is found in 2 Samuel 11-12. This psalm stands as a testament to David's honest confession pursuant to his repentance.

<sup>2</sup> 51:1 - lovingkindness: A translation of the Hebrew *chesed*, which refers here to God's loyal love.

**B 3 Of Guilt Before God 51:4**

C 1 {4} Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight,

C 2 So that You are justified<sup>3</sup> when You speak And blameless when You judge.

**B 4 Of a Personal Sin Nature 51:5**

C 1 {5} Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

C 2 And in sin my mother conceived me.<sup>4</sup>

**B 5 Of God's Standards for the Inner Man 51:6**

C 1 {6} Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,

C 2 And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

**A 3 PRAYER FOR CLEANSING AND RESTORATION 51:7-12**

**B 1 For Cleansing 51:7**

C 1 {7} Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

C 2 Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

**B 2 For Restoration 51:8-12**

C 1 To Personal Joy 51:8

D 1 {8} Make me to hear joy and gladness,

D 2 Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

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<sup>3</sup> 51:4 - justified when You speak: God is never at fault for human sins. Only man is at fault. In the words of Paul the Apostle, "...let God be found true, though every man be found a liar..." (Rom. 3:4).

<sup>4</sup> 51:5 - in sin my mother conceived me: David is not suggesting that he was born of fornication. Rather he is admitting the universal truth that we humans all inherit a sin nature from our parents. Adam and Eve acquired a sin nature and they passed it on to all their descendants. The lone exception is Jesus of Nazareth, who was conceived by the Spirit of God, not by human agency, and born of a virgin.

C 2 To Fellowship 51:9-10

D 1 Because of sins forgiven 51:9

E 1 {9} Hide Your face from my sins

E 2 And blot out all my iniquities.

D 2 Because of a pure attitude 51:10

E 1 A clean heart: {10} Create in me a clean heart, O God,

E 2 A steadfast spirit: And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

C 3 To Valid Service as King 51:11

D 1 {11} Do not cast me away from Your presence

D 2 And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.<sup>5</sup>

C 4 To Joy and Willingness 51:12

D 1 {12} Restore to me the joy of Your salvation<sup>6</sup>

D 2 And sustain me with a willing spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> 51:11 - do not take Your Holy Spirit from me: Many today mistake what David meant, and mouth these same words. God will never remove His Holy Spirit from a believer in Christ. If someone does not have the Spirit of God within him, he is not a believer (Rom. 8:9). What David was actually requesting was that God not remove His anointing Spirit from him, by virtue of which he was God's anointed king, messiah, of Israel. He had experienced firsthand God's anointing him with His Spirit to be king of Israel when he was but a teenager (1 Sam. 16:11-13). And he had observed firsthand the terrible effects of God's withdrawal of His Spirit from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14:23; 18:10-12). He didn't want what happened to Saul because of Saul's sin happen to David because of his own sin. He was asking God not to remove him from being king of Israel and thereby jeopardize the Davidic dynasty (see 2 Sam 7:12-16). If a Christian wishes to pray this prayer today, what he should do is to ask God not to disqualify him from service because of his sin. Service is at issue, not eternal salvation (1 Cor. 9:27).

<sup>6</sup> 51:12 - joy of your salvation: Only when man is in fellowship with God because God has saved him from the deadly effects of sin does he experience real joy. No one out of fellowship with God can experience real joy.

**A 4 VOW TO PRAISE GOD 51:13-15**

**B 1 Through Evangelism 51:13**

C 1 {13} Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,<sup>7</sup>

C 2 And sinners will be converted to You.

**B 2 Through Praise in Music 51:14**

C 1 {14} Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;

C 2 Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

**B 3 Through Testimony 51:15**

C 1 {15} O Lord, open my lips,

C 2 That my mouth may declare Your praise.

**A 5 STATEMENT OF TRUE SACRIFICES 51:16-17**

**B 1 That with Which God is Not Pleased – Mere Sacrifice 51:16**

C 1 {16} For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;

C 2 You are not pleased with burnt offering.

**B 2 The True Sacrifices Which God Desires 51:17**

C 1 A Broken Spirit: {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;

C 2 A Contrite Heart: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

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<sup>7</sup> 51:13 - teach transgressors Your ways: The aim of personal forgiveness and salvation ought always to be evangelism and discipleship of other sinners.

**A 6 PRAYER FOR FAVOR TOWARD ISRAEL 51:18-19<sup>8</sup>**

**B 1 By Blessing Israel's Capital City 51:18**

C 1 Doing Good to Zion: { 18 } By Your favor do good to Zion;

C 2 Protecting Jerusalem: Build the walls of Jerusalem.

**B 2 By Then Enjoying True Worship 51:19**

C 1 Righteous Sacrifices: { 19 } Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,

C 2 Burnt Offerings: In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;

C 3 Sacrificial Offerings: Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Expanded Analysis of Psalm 51

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December, 2009

Published Online by [WordExplain.com](http://WordExplain.com)

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<sup>8</sup> Title, 51:18-19 – Prayer for Favor toward Israel: The thought of this paragraph is that only as God blesses His people (51:18) will they evidence the contrite, broken heart (51:17) necessary for true worship (51:19), which God in turn will enjoy (51:19).