

## PSALM 51

### THE REPENTANCE OF KING DAVID

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INTRODUCTION: Psalm 51 is one of 7 psalms dealing with repentance (also Ps. 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, 143). As indicated in the inspired inscription, it is a Psalm of David, penned after Nathan the prophet confronted David publicly regarding his secret sin with Bathsheba (2Sam12:1-13).

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the murder of her husband Uriah to conceal his sin (2Sam11). After this terrible chain of sin, David did and said nothing, thinking his sins would not be discovered. Now deeds such as these may be considered commonplace and appear to go unpunished for the ungodly rulers of Egypt, Babylon, Philistia (America?), but God would not allow King David to get away with them.

When the King was confronted by Nathan with his charge "Thou art the man" (2Sam11:7), David had three options: 1) he could deny the charge, 2) he could have said nothing and had Nathan killed (as Herod killed John the Baptist who had exposed the king's sin), or 3) he could admit the charge. King David publicly confessed his sin (2Sam11:13).

This is the background of Psalm 51. After the confrontation, David went into the privacy of his own chamber and made the confession to God that this psalm records.

### THE CONFESSION OF DAVID

- [1] Like the publican who went up to the Temple to pray (Lk18:13), David begins by crying out to God for mercy. His hope for forgiveness is based on nothing within himself, but only on the loving-kindness [Heb., *chesed*, that is the covenant-love] of God.
- [3] David uses several words to describe his sin. To *transgress* is to step outside the boundaries God has explicitly set, to break a direct commandment of God. *Iniquity* means that which is altogether wrong, which no circumstance can possibly justify. The word *sin* simply means "to miss the mark", to fall short of God's expectations. Then the word *evil* (v4) means that which is actually wrong. David acknowledges that he is guilty of all of these. **The king said he was wrong.** David has come under deep conviction of sin.
- To "acknowledge my transgressions" is confession, which in the New Testament is the Greek word *homologeō* (1Jn1:9), meaning "same word". Sorrow, remorse, regret; none of these is Biblical confession. Biblical confession is the acknowledgment before God that what you have done is wrong.
- [4] Now David's sin was a sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, David's family, etc., but in the final analysis it is a sin against God. God's Law forbade adultery and murder, and David broke God's Law.

It is to God that David is accountable, to whom he will answer, and by whom he will be judged.

That being said, Scripture also commands that when our sin is against another we must also make our confession to him and seek his forgiveness (Lk17:3-4) and reconciliation (Matt5:23-24).

- [5] David, like all of us, was born a sinner; even as a babe in the womb we are accountable for the sin of Adam (Rom5:12). Paul said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom7:18). We may not have committed the sins David had, but we are capable of committing them. We sin because we are sinners, rather than being sinners because we commit sins.
- [6] God is not interested in what we are on the surface. "...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1Sam16:7). This was the problem with the Pharisees; outwardly they appeared righteous, but Jesus said their "inward parts" were wicked (Lk11:39).

#### THE CLEANSING OF DAVID

- [7] Why was David forgiven? To say he was forgiven because he confessed his sin is only part of the answer. The key is in the word "hyssop". At the first Passover in Egypt, God commanded the Israelites to slay a lamb, eat it, and apply its blood to the doorposts of their houses. The blood was to be applied with hyssop (Ex12:22). Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb (1Cor5:7). David can only be forgiven by the application of Christ's shed blood to his heart. David can be forgiven because the Lord Jesus has paid the price for David's sin.
- [8] To "hear joy and gladness" is possible for the believer only when he is in fellowship with the Lord; such fellowship is broken by unconfessed sin. The "bones which Thou [i.e., God] hast broken" is a figurative reference to the Lord's chastisement of the unrepentant saint (1Cor11:31-32; Heb12:5-6).
- [9] David knows that the Lord is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity" (Hab1:13). David's desire for fellowship with God (Ps23:6) can only be fulfilled if his sin can be removed as a barrier to his relationship with God. We cannot have communion/fellowship with God while living in sin.
- [10] The word here used for "create" is the same word as used in Genesis 1:1 (Heb., *bara*), meaning "to create out of nothing". David is saying that there is nothing in our natural hearts that can be used by God. The scriptures never say that God "changes" our hearts; rather, He creates in us a *new* heart (Ezek36:26; 2Cor5:17).
- [11] As N.T. believers in the Body of Christ, we can never pray this part of David's prayer. A Christian has God's promise to never take His Holy Spirit from us (Jn14:16). We can grieve God's Holy Spirit (Eph4:30), we can quench Him (1Thess5:19), but He will not leave us.

- [12] A believer does not lose his salvation when he sins, but he does lose the "joy" (and thus assurance) of his salvation. Our relationship with God (as His sons, Jn1:12; Rom8:16) does not change, but our fellowship with Him within that unchanging relationship does.

#### THE RESTORATION OF FELLOWSHIP

- [13] "Then will I teach...", that is, once his communion with God was restored. David understood that he could only be used by the LORD as he walked by the Spirit in fellowship with God.

The repentance of David and his restoration as an instrument of God's for evangelism foreshadows the repentance of the Jews as a nation and God's future use of them to evangelize the world during the Tribulation (Rom11:15; Rev7).

- [14] David's prophetic ministry (i.e., composing divinely-inspired psalms) ceased when out of fellowship with the LORD due to unconfessed sin; he craves restoration of both his fellowship with God and God's use of him as a prophet.

- [15] Only when we are in fellowship with God can we praise His Name and witness to others of Him. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, was silent and could not record psalms from God while out of fellowship with Him. Likewise, God will not use a believer today who is living in sin (2Tim2:19-21).

- [17] God's desire is not for sacrifice. A sacrifice means a sin has been committed and atonement (OT)/propitiation (NT) must be made. God's desire is that the sin not be committed! David is saying that God wants our desire to also be a holy life -- to hate sin as much as He does.

Yes, the requirement of the Law under which David lived was to offer sacrifices for sin. God expected that outward act of obedience. But David realized that that outward act was pleasing to God only after his heart was right (Matt5:23-24).

- [18] When Israel as a nation repents of her greatest sin (Hos5:15-6:3), that of rejecting Christ, she will be saved (Rom11:26-27). At that time, Christ will return to deliver Jerusalem (Zech12:8-9) and rebuild the Temple (Zech6:12-13) which will be defiled during the Tribulation (Dan9:27; 2Thess2:3-4). The Temple built by Christ will be the Millennial Temple, which is described in great detail in Ezekiel 40-48.

- [19] The "sacrifices of righteousness" are those sacrifices that will be offered in the Millennial Temple (Ezek44; Zech14:16-21). These offerings will not be for atonement, as were the sacrifices commanded under the Mosaic Law, be memorial in nature much like the Lord's Supper is during the Church Age (1Cor11:25-26); for this reason they will be pleasing to God.

## CONCLUSIONS

Though David was forgiven of his grievous sins and his fellowship and usefulness to God were restored, his sin still had CONSEQUENCES. As prophesied by Nathan (2Sam12:10-12), David's family would suffer as a consequence of his sin. In fact, four of David's sons would die as the four-fold restoration required by the Law for the taking of another man's lamb (Ex22:1; 2Sam12:6): the child of his and Bathsheba's adultery (2Sam12:19), Amnon (2Sam13:28-29), Absalom (2Sam18:14-15), and Adonijah (1Kgs2:24-25). Beyond this, his own son (Absalom) would lead a rebellion against David and the nation of Israel; his wives would be publicly raped by his son (Absalom); his daughter (Tamar) would be raped by her brother (Amnon), who would be killed by another brother (Absalom); and his son King Solomon would himself be overcome by sexual sin that would lead him and the nation into idolatry, resulting in civil war. God said He would allow all this to happen as a consequence of David's sin.

Why should we strive to live holy lives free from sin? Most importantly, because that pleases the Lord. But also because sin, even though it may be forgiven by a merciful God, has consequences for us and others (especially one's family).