

Psalm 51:1-9

Introduction: David's sin with Bathsheba (cf. 2nd Sam. 11-12) has significant consequences, not the least of which is a threat to the fulfillment of God's covenant with David in 2nd Sam. 7. Can David's sin derail God's ultimate purpose in David's life? Or more specifically, can your sin derail God's ultimate purpose for your life?

This psalm springs from the blackest moments of David's self-knowledge, yet it explores not only the depths of David's guilt but also some of the farthest reaches of God's grace. (Kidner)

Title: *To the music director. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.* (cf. 2nd Samuel 11-12)

- 1) The believer owns his sin—51:1-6 (NB the 5 uses of “my”)
 - a) He recognizes the one remedy for his sin—51:1
 - i) God's legal covenant faithfulness—51:1a ¹ *Be gracious [chanan] to me, O God, according to Your loyal/committed love [chesed];*
 - ii) God's emotional compassion—51:1b *according to Your abundant tender mercies [racham], wipe away/erase [machah] my ① rebellious acts [peshah].* (to rebel against the standard)
 - b) He recognizes the nature of his sin—51:2-3
 - i) The filth and guilt of sin—51:2 ² *Thoroughly wash/laundry [kabas] me from my ② iniquity [avon] (to pervert or twist the standard) and purify [taher] me from my ③ sin [chatta'ah], (to fall short of the standard) (cf. 2nd Sam. 12:13)*
 - ii) Why? ³ *because I know/acknowledge my ④ rebellious acts [peshah] and my ⑤ sin [chatta'ah] is continually in front of me* (a constant felt experience).
 - (1) To acknowledge one's sin is to have a truth so grasped by the mind that it changes one's life. (Motyer)
 - (2) David's current sense of guilt compared to earlier when he attempted to cover his tracks in his self-deception (cf. 2nd Sam.).
 - iii) Cf. Ex. 34:7
 - c) He recognizes the Divine Judge of his sin—51:4
 - i) David's treason against the Judge—51:4 ⁴ *Against You, You only, I have sinned [chata] and done what is evil [ra'] in Your sight,*
 - (1) This is why Nathan emphasized the Godward nature of David's sin (cf. 2nd Sam. 12:9-10 [despising God's Word and God Himself])
 - ii) David's acceptance of the Judge's verdict—*so that You are right [tsadaq] when You speak* (through the prophet Nathan); *blameless [zakah] when You judge [shaphat].*
 - (1) No one can find fault with God as He addresses David's sin.
 - iii) It is undeniable that David's sin did cause harm to others, but here his focus is on the treasonous nature of his problem.
 - iv) We need to take God's side against ourselves.

- d) He recognizes the congenital root of his sin—51:5 (his sin with Bathsheba sprang from an old root understood as original sin)
 - i) Traced back to his birth—⁵ *Behold, I was born in iniquity [avon]*,
 - ii) Traced back even further to his conception—*and in sin [chet] my mother conceived me.*
 - iii) David's problem is not just a particular sin or sins, but rather his problem is the spiritual predicament of himself. David's sin was a problem from his earliest moments of existence.
 - iv) BTW, this shows that both the infant at birth and the unborn child at conception are moral and personal beings. (Motyer)
 - e) He recognizes the pervasive nature of his sin—51:6 ⁶ *Behold,*
 - i) *You take pleasure in integrity in the innermost being,*
 - ii) *and in the secret place You cause me to know wisdom.*
 - iii) Despite God's desire, David sins against God.
- 2) He desires cleansing from his sin—51:7-12
- a) His desire for spiritual cleansing—51:7-9
 - i) He wants forgiveness for previous sin—51:7-9
 - (1) Spiritual purity—51:7 (like the cleansing of a leper in Lev. 14:6ff)
David uses two figures of speech. Cf. 51:2
 - (a) Ceremony—⁷ *Purify* (“un-sin”) [*chata*] *me with hyssop, and I will be pure [taher]*;
 - (b) Laundry—*wash* [*kabas*] *me and I will be whiter than snow.*
 - (2) Restoration of joy—51:8
 - (a) God is the source of joy—⁸ *Cause me to hear rejoicing and gladness;*
 - (b) Painful effects of our sin—*may* (so that?) *the bones that You have crushed rejoice.* (cf. Ps. 32)
 - (3) Forgiveness—51:9
 - (a) Pay no attention to—⁹ *Hide Your face from my sins [chet]*
 - (b) Erase—*and wipe away [machah] all my iniquities [avon]*. (cf. 51:1)
- 3) Things we need to remember
- a) We need to take God's side against ourselves.
 - b) We need to take God's Word against our sin. (1st John 1:9)
 - c) We need to take God's Word that explains the remedy for our sin.

Psalm 51:10-17

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2) He desires cleansing from his sin—51:7-12 (from last time)

- Not just from sin's undesirable consequences
- a) His desire for spiritual cleansing for previous sin—51:7-9
 - i) Spiritual purity—51:7 (like the cleansing of a leper in Lev. 14:6ff) David uses two figures of speech. Cf. 51:2
 - (1) Ceremony—⁷ *Purify* (“un-sin”) [*chata*] *me with hyssop, and I will be pure* [*taher*];
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 - (2) Erase—*and wipe away* [*machah*] *all my iniquities* [*avon*]. (cf. 51:1)
- b) His desire for renewal to prevent future sin—51:10-12 (or else David will return to his sinning ways; NB 3 uses of spirit/Spirit)
 - i) Stated **positively**: renewal of steadfastness—51:10
 - (1) ¹⁰ *Create* [*bara*] *in me a clean heart, O God,*
 - (a) People may change their habits but only God can change their heart.
 - (2) *and renew* [*chadash*] *a spirit* ① *of establishing within me.*
 - ii) Stated **negatively**: awareness of God's presence and enablement—51:11
 - (1) ¹¹ *Do not cast me away from Your presence*
 - (2) *and do not take Your Holy Spirit* ② *from me.*
 - (a) As had happened to Saul (cf. 1st Sam. 16:13-14)
 - (i) David is not asking God to keep him saved (i.e., not to remove his salvation from him and unsave him). He is asking that the theocratic anointing not depart. He did not want God to do to him for his sins what God did to Saul. When Saul lost the anointing, he became unfit to rule; in fact, he became demented. In short, David's prayer on this point is completely non-soteriological and has nothing to say regarding the regeneration

and indwelling of the Old Testament believers, as is commonly held. (McCune)

(ii) This **cannot** happen to Christians today

iii) Restated **positively**: joyful, deliberate obedience—51:12 (a delight in God's will)

(1) ¹² *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation*

(2) *and sustain me with a willing spirit* ③.

3) The results of spiritual cleansing—51:13-17

• These are things David cannot do in a Godward way until he is forgiven

a) Godward evangelism toward others—51:13

i) David's desire—¹³ *Then I will teach rebellious ones Your ways*

(1) This psalm itself is an answer to David's prayer

ii) David's certainty—*and sinners will return to You.*

(1) "Sinners" is used in Ps. 1:5

b) Expressions of joy—51:14

i) Despite the violent death of Uriah—51:14 ¹⁴ *Rescue me from the guilt of shedding bloods, O God, the God of my salvation;*

ii) The result of having guilt removed—*then my tongue will shout for joy because of Your righteousness.*

c) Praise to God—51:15 (the cry of one whose conscience has shamed him into silence earlier (Kidner))

i) David's request—¹⁵ *O Sovereign One (Adonai), open my lips,*

ii) David's responsibility—*and my mouth will declare Your praise.*

d) A better understanding of God's expectations—51:16-17

i) Stated **negatively**—51:16 (God abhors hypocrisy)

(1) Communion/fellowship with God through the **peace**-offering (cf. Lev. 3, 7)—¹⁶ *For You do not take pleasure in sacrifice, or else I would give it;*

(2) Dedication to God through the **burnt**-offering (cf. Lev. 1)—*You are not pleased with a burnt offering.*

(3) There was no sin offering for serious, premeditated sin.

(4) God did not desire sacrifices from the unrepentant

ii) Stated **positively**—51:17

(1) ¹⁷ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit* (disposition);

(a) Broken of rebellion

(2) *a broken and crushed heart, O God, You will not regard with contempt.*

(a) The heart broken by guilt and repentance

(3) While a physical sacrifice may at times be costly, the true sacrifice will cost us even more.

4) A later addition? (perhaps from the time of the Exile?)—51:18-19

a) A prayer to God—51:18

- i) Stated **generally**: grace—¹⁸ *In Your favor, do good to (Your people in) Zion;*
 - ii) Stated **specifically**: security—*rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.*
 - iii) The anticipation of the fulfillment of prophecy
 - b) The pleasure of God—51:19 (at the restoration of temple sacrifices; cf. Neh. 12:43)
 - i) ¹⁹ *At that time You will take pleasure in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering;*
 - ii) *at that time they will offer young bulls on Your altar.*
- 5) Things we need to remember:
- a) We need to take God's side against ourselves.
 - b) We need to take God's Word against our sin. (1st John 1:9)
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