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O God, A Broken and Contrite Heart You Will Not Despise Psalm 51:1-19

*For the director of music. A **psalm** of **David**.
When the prophet **Nathan** came to **him**
after **David** had committed adultery with **Bathsheba**.*

O God, a broken and contrite heart You will not despise DIG: How many commandments did David break in the affair with Bathsheba? In light of his arrogance, adultery, deception and murder, how does he dare approach the LORD? What does he feel? Murder is a capital crime in the Torah. So is adultery. Why? Since such sins involve others how can David only sin against God? How can an unborn child be sinful? What does this show about the nature of sin? In light of this, what does David ask God to do? What does it mean to be cleansed with hyssop? Why did David request this? On what basis did David hope to restore his relationship with ADONAI? Why did David generalize his prayer to include the whole nation? What kind of sacrifices does YHVH desire? When will God accept righteous sacrifices?

REFLECT: Has covering up your sin backfired in your life? How have you seen the LORD's mercy when you owned up to your sin? Are there really any "victimless crimes?" How do personal failings affect God? Others? Self? Society? Are you more sensitive to sin and brokenness in yourself as a believer than beforehand? Why?

How we long for renewal! Every area of our life is so easily corroded and stained. Our marriages need renewal. Our families need renewal. The universal Church, made up of **Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14)**, needs renewal. But most of all, we need personal renewal - a deep inner conviction of our own **sin** and poverty - followed by a fresh cleansing and filling by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. But there is no renewal apart from pain. This pain may come in moral crisis. It may come when the peaceful order of everyday life is broken by illness, economic reversal, or turmoil in relationships. It may come when we reflect upon the pace with which life passes or our haunting need for meaning.

As Donald Williams relates in his commentary on **Psalms**, the deepest renewal is spiritual, and it has a moral base. Since **ADONAI** is holy and since **He** has given us a conscience, we cannot be renewed apart from dealing with our moral failure before **Him**. Try as we may, we cannot remove sin by rationalization or denial. At some point our intellectual and psychological defenses will be broken. In that moment of truth when we face our own despair, **God** vows to come to us. But how will we know what to do? How can we experience cleansing and renewing power? **Psalm 51** becomes the key to new life. It opens the door to a radical change for each person who is willing to pray this prayer from the heart.



David had been guilty of a whole chain of **sin**. Lust led to adultery, adultery to deception, and deception to murder. Trying to cover **his** tracks only dug the pit that **he** was in deeper. In this sense **David** was no different from any of us. Finally, **Ha'Shem** confronted **him** through **Nathan the prophet**. The ringing words: **You are the man (Second Samuel 12:7)**, brought **David** to **his** knees before **God**. And judgment quickly followed. But at the same time **David** received mercy. When **he** confessed to **Nathan**, "**I have sinned against the LORD**," **Nathan** replied, "**The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die**" (**Second Samuel 12:13**). **Psalm 51**, then, is **David's** deep, prayerful, agonizing response to **his** ruin.³⁴⁶

A. Prayer for Individual Renewal: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing chesed (see commentary on **Ruth**, to see link click **Af - The Concept of Chesed**); according to your great compassion. **David** then uses three words that basically communicate the same idea: evil and **lawlessness** as defined by **YHVH: Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness** (Greek: *anomia*); **in fact, sin is lawlessness (First John 3:4)**. However, upon closer examination, each word also carries a slightly different meaning.

Blot out my transgressions (Hebrew: *pesha* refers to *an arrogant sin*). Transgression means to choose to **sin**, to intentionally and willfully disobey. Samson intentionally broke his Nazirite vow by touching a dead lion (**Numbers 6:1-5; Judges 14:8-9**) and allowing his hair to be cut (**Judges 16:17**). In doing so he was committing a transgression. **David** was referring to this kind of **sin** when **he** wrote: **Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered (Psalm 32:1)**. When we knowingly run a stop sign, tell a lie, or blatantly disregard an authority, we are transgressing.

Wash away all my iniquity (Hebrew: *avon* is more deeply rooted and means *making a premeditated choice that continues without repentance*). **David's** sin with Bathsheba that led to the killing of her husband, Uriah, was iniquity (**Second Samuel 11:3-4, 12:9**). **Micah 2:1** says: **Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At mornings light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.**

And cleanse me from my sin (Hebrew: *chata*, meaning *to miss the mark*). *Chata* can refer to doing something against **ADONAI** or against a person (**Exodus 10:16**), doing the opposite of what is right (**Galatians 5:17**), doing something that will have negative results (**Proverbs 24:33-34**), and failing to do something you know is right (**Numbers 15:27**). As **Romans 3:23** says, sin is a general term that **falls short of the glory of God (Psalm 51:1-2)**.³⁴⁷

The power of **verses 1** and **2** lies in the verbs. To **blot out** implies a comparison with human records that can be erased; **wash away** compares forgiveness with washing clothing (often viewed as an extension of the person), and **cleanse** is drawn from worshiping at the Temple where one might be purified by making an offering (see commentary on **Exodus Fb - The Five Offerings of the Tabernacle: Christ, Our Sacrificial Offering**).³⁴⁸ Thus, to sin is to deviate from **God's** moral standard, and ultimately, to miss the perfection of **YHVH Himself, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)**. As **Yeshua** demands: **be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36; Psalm 145:8-9)**. Who then can stand on the Day of Judgment? We must join **David's** cry: **Blot out my transgressions.**

B. Confession and Contrition: In search for forgiveness **David** opened **his sinful heart. For I know my transgressions** (Hebrew: *pesha*), **and my sin is always before me**. There is a cleansing when we take responsibility for our own **sin**. We have tendency to blame everyone and everything but ourselves. But **Nathan's** words brought **David** back to reality: **Against You, You only, have I sinned** (Hebrew: *chata*) **and done what is evil in Your sight so that You are proved right when you speak and**

justified when You judge. This is the road to recovery. When we take our **sin** to **ADONAI**, there is absolute justice and absolute mercy for **God** delights in forgiving the repentant sinner.³⁴⁹ **Surely I was born in iniquity** (Hebrew: *avon*), **and in sin my mother conceived me.** We are all born, yes, even conceived, with the disease of **sin** because of **Adam's** fall: **By one man's disobedience many were made sinners (Romans 5:19).** As a result, we are totally corrupt and unable to save ourselves from our **sinful** condition. **Surely You desire truth in the innermost place (Psalm 51:3-6).** Only when we believe that **the Truth became flesh (John 1:14)** and died for our **sins** can this be achieved. The godly surrender, cry out to **God**, confess their **sins**, and receive the assurance of **Messiah's** forgiveness.

C. Prayer of Renewal: Now that **David** had admitted **his sin**, acknowledged **the One** against whom **he** had sinned, and gotten to the depths of **his sin**, in utter helplessness **he** must either despair or throw **himself** completely on the mercy of **ADONAI**. Knowing the love of **YHVH**, **he** cried out: **Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.** The word is commonly used in describing the **cleansing** of a leper's house. **Hyssop** is also used to sprinkle blood in the rite of purification (**Lev 14:52**). Underlying the cleansing, then is the concept of sacrificial blood. In a parallel phrase, **David** asks: **Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.** As **Ha'Shem** promised through **Isaiah**, "**Though your sins are like blood-colored scarlet, they shall be as white as snow**" (**Isaiah 1:18**).

This deep **cleansing** gave **David** the boldness to pray for renewal, for restoration. **Let me hear joy and gladness. He** not only wanted **cleansing**; **he** wanted communion with **ADONAI**. **David's joy**, and our **joy in the Lord**, is more than an emotional expression - it is a contented resting in **His** presence. **David** just wanted to be right again with **God**. **He** had been cut down with conviction. **Let the bones You have crushed rejoice.** Confronted with the truth, **he** was shattered. **Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity** so **they** are all stricken from the record (**Psalm 51:7-9**). Up to this point, **David** had been pleading for forgiveness again and again: **blot out, wash, cleanse, and hide Your face.** This emphasized the depths of **his** grief and the longing for reconciliation. **Yeshua** tells us to keep on asking, to keep on seeking, and to keep on knocking (**Luke 11:9-10**). And this is exactly what **David** did. **He** was bold in prayer both because of **his** deep pain and because of **his** deep love of **the LORD**.³⁵⁰

David was aware that **he** had become indifferent in **his** attitudes so **he** needed a new beginning. **Create in me a pure heart, O God.** The word **create** (Hebrew:

bara) is the same one used in **Genesis 1:1**. **And** this thought is reinforced with the parallel phrase, **renew a steadfast spirit within me**. Basically, **David** was asking for a new **heart** and a new **spirit**, which can only be done by **God Himself**. **He** was also aware that Sha'ul had been removed as king because of his **sin**, and this was revealed with the departure of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. **Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me**. In the Dispensation of Torah, **the Ruach** would come and go. In addition, the righteous of the TaNaKh would have to continually offer up sacrifices for their **sins** as long as they lived. In the Dispensation of Grace, however, **the Holy Spirit** does not leave us; and once saved, we are eternally secure (see commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). The same **Spirit** that brought **David** under conviction of **sin** is the same **Spirit** who brings assurance and comfort: **Restore to me the joy of your salvation**. This **salvation** includes deliverance from the penalty and power of **sin**. It is **the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)**. When **God** brings **salvation . . . joy** comes. **And grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51:10-12)**. It is a **spirit** ready to do **God's** bidding.³⁵¹ We can't lose our **salvation**, but we can lose **the joy of** our **salvation** with unconfessed, unrepentant **sin**. That's what happened to **David**. Or a believer can lose **the joy** of their **salvation** when they live a life of legalism (see the commentary on **Galatians Bp - Until Messiah is Formed in You**).

B. Thanksgiving: Out of the **joy of salvation** and **his** resulting readiness, **David** promised three things. First, **David** said that if **Ha'Shem** would forgive **him**, then he would **teach transgressors His ways, and sinners would turn back to Him (Psalm 51:13)**. Because **David** had known **transgression and sin**, he could **teach transgressors and sinners**. Credible witness comes from those whose lives have been redeemed from their own pain. Rabbi Sha'ul could deal so effectively with legalism because he had been so legalistic before his conversion (**Philippians 3:2-6**). Don't waste your sorrows, help others by what you have learned and give the glory to **God**.

Secondly, **David** now brings the prayer to its climax, asking **YHVH**, once again, to clear the books, saying: **deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God**. The word **bloodshed** is literally *bloods*, plural (Hebrew: *damim*). The word signifies **blood** that has been **shed** violently, and refers to **David's** arranged murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah (**Second Samuel 11:15**). **David** reinforces this final plea for forgiveness by using the address: **the God of my salvation**, as if reminding **the LORD** of **His** grace. **David** declared that when the curse was lifted: **My tongue will sing of Your righteousness. Open my lips, Adonai, and my mouth will praise You (Psalm**

51:14-15).

Thirdly, **David** promised that if **God** would forgive **his sins** he would **sacrifice** to **Him**. **You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it. He** knew that **Ha'Shem** did not desire merely an animal sacrifice. **You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings** (see commentary on **Exodus Fe - The Burnt Offering**). What, then, could **David** offer to **Adonai** in worship? Isra'el was taught by **YHVH** not to come to **Him** empty handed. **He** must bring something! All **David** could offer was **his** shattered spirit and **his** broken heart. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken a contrite heart.** When we discover **God's** mercy and **His** incredible love for us **while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8)**, this is the final breaking. As our heart sobs, **the Lord** puts **His** arms around us and we are finally broken. **O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:16-17).**³⁵²

In the Dispensation of Torah, anyone who sinned as **David** did, had to receive a word from a priest or a prophet acknowledging he was forgiven. Only then could the penitent person again take part in worship and make a peace offering (see commentary on **Exodus Fg - The Peace Offering**). But in the Dispensation of Grace, the word of pardon is written in Scripture: **The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (First John 1:7).**³⁵³

A. Prayer for National Renewal: As king, **David** now prays for the nation. Broken leaders mean broken people. A renewed leader will renew a congregation. Once the people are restored, proper worship will come from their renewed hearts. **In your good pleasure make Zion prosper and build up the walls of Jerusalem.** For the glorious answer to **David's** prayer see **Nehemiah 12:43**, where **the walls of Tziyon** were completed **and they offered great sacrifices that day . . . and the sound of rejoicing could be heard far away. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight You; then bulls will be offered on Your altar (Psalm 51:18-19).** It was as if **David** was saying, "The problem isn't with the sacrificial system . . . the problem is with us! Today renewal is again stirring the Church. As we are broken before **ADONAI**, **the walls of Yerushalayim** will be built and **the sacrifices of the righteous** will ascend to **His** praise and glory."³⁵⁴