

## Confession

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### Quick Links to the Study

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**Confession of sins is challenging for most Americans these days. Our culture can more easily say, "I goofed!" Or, "I made a boo-boo!" Deep, profound, despicable guilt is "un-American" in our thinking. But Psalm 51 challenges a culture and a people to probe way below the surface of human conduct and to take a serious look at the depraved human heart that lurks deep down inside every person. David speaks in the psalm of problems far deeper than adultery and murder, as heinous as these actions are. He had come to recognize the source of these actions came from something foul and detestable down inside himself. This, in spite of being the king of the nation, and being called "a man after God's own heart."**



**Spiritual health is closely linked to coming to grips with exactly who we are before a holy and absolutely righteous God, who will determine our eternal destiny in final judgment. Consequently, the study of this psalm is vital to our quest for a spiritually healthy life and to right standing before the Judge of this universe.**

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#### I. Context

Especially important is the background study on [Psalm 51](#) done in an earlier study of this passage. Beyond that the background analysis found in the [other studies in the psalms](#) is important. Some new material will supplement that which has already been done. This Bible study draws upon the previous one, but will seek to underscore new perspectives drawn from the text.

Interpreting the psalms is always a multi-layered process as we seek to peel back the layers of de-

A diagram illustrating the relationship between three concepts. At the bottom is a green oval labeled "Composition". An arrow points from "Composition" to a blue oval labeled "Worship Use". Another arrow points from "Worship Use" to a red box labeled "Meaning Today". A third, longer arrow points directly from "Composition" to "Meaning Today".

development.

use of the psalm plays an important role. That history has been written in each. The *Jewish history* of usage and understanding of the psalm is traced from the scrolls Qumran community, from the inter-testamental Jewish period, from the Talmudic period, and from rabbinic Judaism to the medieval period, from the third to fifth Christian centuries. Then the history of the psalm in the Christian era is traced. This is a significant source of insight. This begins with possible Jewish influences on the Church Fathers in the early Christian era. Then the history of the psalm in the Protestant Reformation takes place in the 1500s, interpreted from both Catholic and Protestant viewpoints.

interpretive traditions is something more basic. Until the past century, coming out of biblical archaeology, the Hebrew text has often been the only translation of the Hebrew text done in 175 BCE represents our best understanding of the text. To be sure, that LXX translation / interpretation was based on Jerome who produced the Latin Vulgate translation. Scholars are occasionally at a loss to make clear sense out of the LXX and the Vulgate for help in producing an English translation.

a psalm is serious, detailed work. And conclusions drawn for application, must be made with due respect to the diversity of the Bible.



Then Nathan went to his house.” The following verses depict David passionately pleading with God to spare the life of this baby. When the baby died, David went into the house of the Lord and worshipped the Lord. Perhaps out of this time comes the origin of this psalm. Or, perhaps it reflects a latter reflective understanding of David, as he looks back on this experience.

The editorial hand on the psalm surfaces with allusions to the Temple of Solomon in vv. 18-19, which now lay in ruins. This suggests the final shape of the psalm took place during the Babylonian exile (586-539 BCE), some 400 plus years after David's reign (1005-965 BCE). The placing of this psalm after Psalm 50 with its powerful emphasis on divine

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judgment of Israel was most likely intended to express a message urging national repentance in view of the potential of divine wrath over sinfulness.

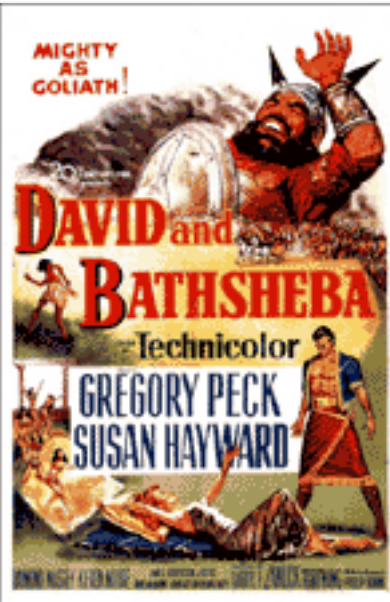
The history of the transmission of this psalm from its origin to its final shape is impossible to determine with certainty. The assumption would be that this psalm surfaced during certain liturgies in temple worship from

Solomon's time until the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BCE. At this point, I would disagree with Form Critics who only allow for an exilic or post exilic date of composition.

Clinton McCann (*New Interpreters Bible*, iPreach) supplies an exilic assessment of this psalm:

The superscription identifies the psalm as a prayer made by David after the prophet Nathan had confronted him with his sin in the affair with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11—12). The learned scribe who found a setting for the psalm in the story of David saw a verbal connection between verse 4 and 2 Samuel 11:27 and 12:13 (see Introduction, sec. 3.5; and Psalms 3, sec. 4). The superscription has been the basis for the interpretation of the psalm as the expression of David's individual experience and penitence. This approach has produced moving and profound readings of the psalm, but it has always, especially in the modern period, stood in a certain tension with the liturgical use of the psalm for general, corporate, and individual penance.

There are many features in the psalm that suggest it was composed during or after the exile and was used in Israel as a general penitential prayer. The psalm may be the product of considerable development; verses 16-17 and 18-19 are often thought to be expansions of an individual prayer for help. But its history may even be more complex than that of two expansions. In its present form, its language and thought are connected with that of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah 40—66. It reads like an anticipation of or response to the promises of a new heart and spirit in Jeremiah (Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:39-40) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 36:25ff.). Interpreted in this context, some of the prayer's difficult points will make better theological sense, and verses 18-19 form an appropriate conclusion rather than a contradictory addition. The



prayer seeks a cleansing and purification from all transgressions, iniquities, and sins (vv. 1-2, 9). It may have been composed for use by the congregation, and individuals as part of it, in connection with the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:30). Understanding the psalm as a prayer composed for the community and for individuals in their identity with the community has important consequences for its interpretation and liturgical use.

**Internal History.** McCann (*New Interpreter's Bible*, iPreach) summarizes the internal history issue well:

Although it is possible to conclude that the superscription dates the psalm accurately,<sup>213</sup> it is much more likely that it was added later by the editors of the psalter to invite readers to hear Psalms 51 against the background of the story of David's taking of Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11), as well as the subsequent confrontation between Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1-14; cf. Ps 51:4 and 2 Sam 12:13).

The interpretation of this psalm depends upon the perceived historical backdrop from which the words are to be interpreted. The original backdrop is the sinful conduct of King David with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. When David saw this beautiful woman bathing he became so enamored with her that he eventually arranged for her husband's death after he got her pregnant with his child. When David took her as a widow into his house to become his wife, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin and to pronounce God's judgment that the baby conceived in sin would die. According to [2 Sam. 12:13](#), David acknowledged his sin to the prophet. Thus the psalm provides a commentary of sorts on this acknowledgment of sin by David.

The one cannot ignore the other backdrop that is clearly in the psalm as well: the Babylonian Exile. As a penitential psalm it served to express both individ-

ual and corporate repentance to those Jews seeking to hang on to their religious heritage during the time of captivity in Babylon. This subsequent use provides us with helpful clues for application to our life today. The psalm provides one of the more details presentations of the biblical idea of repentance and forgiveness. Thus its importance takes on even greater significance through its theological function in the Bible.

Also important is to address the issue of who is speaking these words of confession. Marvin Tate (*WBC*, Logos Systems) provides some insight:

How is the speaker in the psalm to be identified? Of course the traditional interpretation has identified the speaker as David during one of the great crises of his career. Dalglish (*Psalm Fifty-One*, 226) argues that while the book is probably not from David, it is “a royal penitential psalm spoken by or for the king.” J. H. Eaton (*Kingship and the Psalms*, SBT 2nd series 32 [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1975], 71–72, 177–81) also presents a case for a king as the speaker. He maintains that emphasis on the spirit of God in 51:12–14 “points beyond an ordinary Israelite, and in fact to the king” (71; also Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One*, 228). He thinks that the appeal to God’s faithfulness and love in v 3, the appeal to God’s righteousness in 16, and the expression “God of my salvation” all point to a kingly personal covenant with God. The role of the king as teacher and admonisher is recognized



in v 15 (cf. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 181–82), and it is assumed that the psalm would have been appropriate for an annual rite of atonement led by the king in pre-exilic Israel (72, 177). Dalglish (*Psalm Fifty-One*, 227) suggests that the “bloodshed”/“blood-guilt” of v 16 is appropriate to the judgment on Manasseh in 2 Kgs 24:3 (“... for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not pardon”). The kingly office was a representative one, and Dalglish argues that “unrequited blood” must have been “like a Damoclean sword” which threatened the life of the nation during the reign of Josiah.

The interpretation of the speaker as the king is an attractive one, and, if it is correct, the scribes who supplied the superscription rightly understood the psalm. The penitence of kings is well established both in and outside the OT (besides David, note Ahab in 1 Kgs 22:27–29; Josiah in 2 Kgs 22:11–13; 23:21–25, and the Prayer of Manasseh referred to above; for reference to nonbiblical literature see the works of Dalglish and Eaton, *passim*). The probability of atonement rites is high. However, confessions of sin and prayers for forgiveness were not restricted to kings. Prophets, priests, and lay persons in small-group rituals were not excluded.

One cannot restrict the voice of the psalmist just to David. Ultimately he represents each sinner who comes to God in repentance while seeking forgiveness.

## b. Literary

**Genre.** Of course, as a part of the psalms, psalms 51 is Hebrew poetry and follows the usual conventions of ancient Hebrew poetic expression. For a more detailed treatment of this, see the Bible study on [Psalm 15](#), **Broad Genre** under **I. b. Literary**. In terms of the specific genre form, this psalm is usually classified as a psalm of lament. Marvin Tate (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) has a helpful summation of this issue:

This is the best known of the seven traditional penitential psalms (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143).

However, the psalm is not easily classified in the usual form-critical categories. It is usually placed in the general classification of the laments of the individual (for discussion of this kind of psalm, see C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 181–94; B. W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983], 73–105). However, such characteristic features as complaint about enemies and prayer for their defeat and/or punishment is missing, as well as any protestation of innocence on the part of the speaker in the psalm



(cf. Pss 7:4–5; 17:2–5), and there is no motivational appeal to God for action (cf. 22:10–11). On the other hand, there is a full confession of sin which is without parallel in any other biblical psalm (though such confession in the past is recalled in 32:5; also note 38:19; 41:5; 69:6; 130:1–8; cf. the confessional prayer of Ezra in Ezra 9:6–15, which is communal in nature; also Num 14:13–23; Isa 6:1–13; Neh 1:4–11; Job 42:1–6; Dan 9:4–19). The paucity in the Psalms of the confession of sin and pleading for forgiveness is striking. B. W. Anderson (*Out of the Depths*, 93–102) treats the “Psalms of Penitence” (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) as a subcategory of individual laments and suggests that they differ in that they tend to internalize the problem of evil (94) and argues that “they agree on the fact that there is no human ground for *claiming* God’s grace (*hesed*)” (99). Anderson (*Out of the Depths*, 95) also argues that the confession in 51:3–7 serves as the complaint element of the lament. Westermann (*Praise and Lament*, 185) contends that in such



prayers as that found in Ps 51 (he cites 27:9) “the complaint lies hidden in the petition,” assuming that in later Israelite religion there was a gradual curtailment of the direct complaint to and against God and an increase in petition, with the element of complaint tending to disappear (186). Thus in a broad sense, Ps 51 may be called an individual lament, but it is more specifically an individual confession of sin and a prayer for forgiveness (cf. Kraus, I, 58–59).

The psalm contains a mixture of literary devices for the communication of its message.

**Literary Setting.** The listing of this psalm in book two is the nearest thing to the issue of literary setting. But this doesn’t provide much insight, since the rationale for the arrangement of the 150 psalms into the five books has been a mystery to scholars for many centuries. The exilic setting for the finalized form of the psalm suggests that it was intentionally placed after psalm 50 in order to set the idea of confession and forgiveness in context with the assertion of the severity of divine wrath in Psalm 50.

## II. Message

**Literary Structure.** The challenge of identifying the thought structure in the psalm has been well identified by Tate (WBC, Logos Systems):

Commentators have not found Ps 51 easy to outline. Weiser notes what he judges to be a lack of “homogeneous construction” and attributes this to the molding of its outward form by “the distress of the life of prayer out of which the psalm has arisen” (401). Auffret (*VT* 26 [1976] 142–47) and A. R. Ceresko (“The Function of Chiasmus in Hebrew Poetry,” *CBQ* 40 [1978] 6) support a major division in the psalm between vv 11 and 12, marked at the beginning and end by the verb הִחַם, “blot out” (in vv 3 and 11). However, Auffret thinks that there is also a relationship between v 10 and v 19 (note the use of the verb הָכַד, “crushed,” in each verse). Also v 10 fits well with v 14 (וִשְׁשׁ, “joy,” is in both verses), and indeed it relates well to the restoration theme in vv 12–16. On the other hand, the use of אָטָה, “sin” in v 11 relates well to vv 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9, and וָעַי, “iniquity/waywardness” relates to vv 4 and 7. Thus an interlocking structure like the following makes good sense: 3–9, 11 and 12, 19–10. The conclusion in vv 20–21 lies outside the primary psalm. The first major division can be subdivided as follows:

Prayer for forgiveness	vv 3–4
Confession of sin	vv 5–6b
Rightness of divine judgment	vv 6cd
Confession of sinfulness	vv 7–8
Prayer for forgiveness	vv 9, 11

The second division divides as follows:

Prayer for restoration	vv 10, 12–14
Vow to teach sinners	v 15
Prayer for the ability to praise	vv 16–19

Vv 20–21 form an addendum.



A word about verse numbering in this psalm. The Hebrew text counts the heading and appended note as two separate verses,<sup>1</sup> whereas the LXX included them in its designation of verse one. Consequently, the Hebrew text marks off 21 verses, while the LXX contains only 19 in most editions. The English Bible tradition has been to follow the LXX in the pattern of the Latin Vulgate. The verse references listed below will reflect the the LXX and English Bible patterns, but will also provide clarifying indications from the MT text. The content of the psalm is exactly the same, just the marking of verses differs.

A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

WTT Psalm 51:1  
לְמִנְצַח מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד: <sup>2</sup> בְּבוֹא־אֵלָיו נָתַן הַנְּבִיא  
כְּאֶשֶׁר-בָּא אֶל-בֵּת-שֹׁבַע: <sup>3</sup> חָנְנִי אֱלֹהִים כַּחַסְדְּךָ כְּרֹב רַחֲמֶיךָ  
מִחַה פֶּשְׁעִי: <sup>4</sup> (הַרְבֵּה) [הֶרֶב] כִּבְסֵנִי מִעֲוֹנִי וּמִחַטָּאתִי טַהַרֵּנִי:  
כִּי־פֶשְׁעִי אָנִי אֲדַע וְחַטָּאתִי נֶגְדִי תָמִיד: <sup>6</sup> לֵךְ לְבִדְךָ חַטָּאתִי  
וְהִרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עֲשִׂיתִי לְמַעַן תִּצְדַּק בְּדִבְכֶךָ תִּזְכֶּה בְּשִׁפְטֶךָ: <sup>7</sup>  
הֵן־בְּעֵוֹן חוֹלַלְתִּי וּבְחַטָּא יַחַמְתֵּנִי אֱמִי: <sup>8</sup> הֵן־אָמַת חִפְצָתְךָ  
בְּטָחוֹת וּבִסְתֶם חֲכָמָה תוֹדִיעֵנִי: <sup>9</sup> תַּחַטָּאֲנִי בְּאֲזוֹב וְאַטְהַר  
תְּכַבֵּסֵנִי וּמִשְׁלֹג אֲלַבִּין: ...  
<sup>11</sup> הַסֹּתֵר פָּנֶיךָ מִחַטָּאֵי וְכָל־עֲוֹנֹתִי מִחַה:

LXT Psalm 50:1 εἰς τὸ τέλος ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ <sup>2</sup> ἐν τῷ ἔλθειν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ναθαν τὸν προφῆτην ἡνίκα εἰσηλθεν πρὸς Βηρσαβεε <sup>3</sup> ἔλῃσόν με ὁ θεὸς κατὰ τὸ μέγα ἔλεός σου καὶ κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν οἰκτιρισμῶν σου ἐξάλειψον τὸ ἀνόμημά μου <sup>4</sup> ἐπὶ πλεῖον πλυνόν με ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνομίας μου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας μου καθάρσόν με <sup>5</sup> ὅτι τὴν ἀνομίαν μου ἐγὼ γινώσκω καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία μου ἐνώπιόν μου ἐστὶν διὰ παντός <sup>6</sup> σοὶ μόνῳ ἥμαρτον καὶ τὸ πονηρὸν ἐνώπιόν σου ἐποίησα ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῇς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου καὶ νικήσῃς ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε <sup>7</sup> ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήμφθην καὶ ἐν ἁμαρτίαις ἐκίστησέν με ἡ μήτηρ μου ... <sup>9</sup> ῥαντίεις με ὑσσώπῳ καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι πλυνεῖς με καὶ ὑπὲρ χιόνα λευκανθήσομαι

...<sup>11</sup> hastēr pāne<sup>y</sup>kā mēhātā<sup>a</sup>āy wəkōl-<sup>c</sup>āwōnōtāy mēhē<sup>h</sup>

# NASB

For the choir director. A Psalm of David,

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;

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

- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity  
And cleanse me from my sin.

- 3 For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.

- 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.

- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,  
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

- 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

- 9 Hide Your face from my sins  
And blot out all my iniquities.

## NRSV

To the leader.

A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.

- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.

- 3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

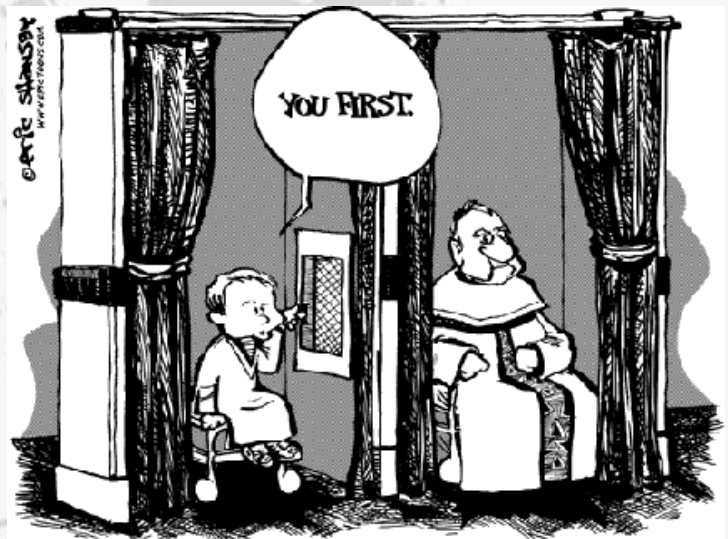
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.

- 5 Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

- 6 You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

- 9 Hide your face from my sins.





and blot out all my iniquities.

### NLT

For the choir director: A psalm of David,  
regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him  
after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.

Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.

- 2 Wash me clean from my guilt.  
Purify me from my sin.
- 3 For I recognize my rebellion;  
it haunts me day and night.
- 4 Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;  
I have done what is evil in your sight.  
You will be proved right in what you say,  
and your judgment against me is just.
- 5 For I was born a sinner—  
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.
- 6 But you desire honesty from the womb,  
teaching me wisdom even there.
- 7 Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ... .
- 9 Don't keep looking at my sins.  
Remove the stain of my guilt.

### Notes:

As Tate (WBC, Logos Systems) develops it, the thought flow moves in five segments:

Prayer for forgiveness	vv 3-4
Confession of sin	vv 5-6b
Rightness of divine judgment	vv 6cd
Confession of sinfulness	vv 7-8
Prayer for forgiveness	vv 9, 11

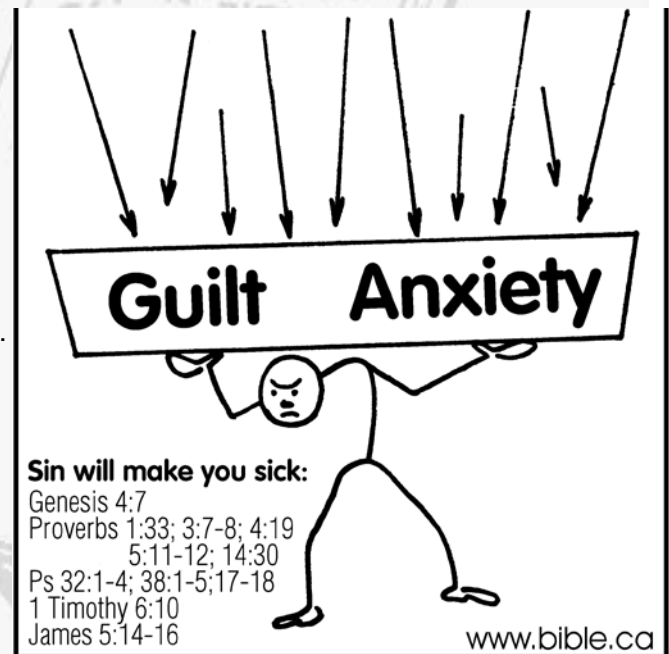
**Prayer for forgiveness, vv. 1-2 (MT, 3-4).** "1 To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

The issue of the heading has already been discussed under [Internal History](#) in the first section above on page three.

The multi-fold petition is

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.

- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.



The plea is for God to show mercy and forgiveness to the sinner coming in sincere repentance. The requested actions are "have mercy," "blot out," "wash," and "cleanse." With graphic imagery the psalmist pleads for divine action toward himself. The extent of this action is defined as "according to your steadfast love," "according to your abundant mercy," and "thoroughly." God's own character defines the nature of His forgiving action toward us. What must be removed from the psalmist's life are "transgressions," "iniquity," and "sin." The composite picture here is of an individual who not only has committed wrong deeds, but who possesses a sinful nature that prompts such actions. As Cecil Sherman (*Formations Commentary*, Logos Systems) puts it so well:

I usually think of my own sins as mistakes, telling myself these errors are not "normal" for me. After all, when I am my "normal" self, I am good. But this text takes sin to a deeper level. My self-centeredness and lifelong pattern of self-justification confirm that my first nature is to take care of "Number



One.” (For a New Testament comment on this idea, see Rom 1:18–3:26.) We don’t need to be “saved” because we occasionally steal a cookie from the cookie jar. Rather, we need to be saved because we have a lifelong tendency to put ourselves in God’s place.

Such a spiritual condition before God must then lead to the next step, confession.

**Confession of sin, vv. 3-4b (MT, 5-6b).** “3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,”

The psalmist keenly recognizes his wayward deeds and guilty heart before God: “I know my transgressions” and “my sin is ever before me,” he declares. He recognizes the ultimate nature of his deeds as actions that are “evil” in God’s eyes. If the voice is David’s originally and the situation were the Bathsheba affair, the bottom line meaning relates to his immorality with this married woman and the murder of her husband. But in subsequent centuries in Jewish and Christian understanding, the meaning becomes broader and covers all actions forbidden by God. To be clear, sin hurts others and almost always involves other people. But in the final analysis sinful action is ultimately against the God who is our Creator, and Redeemer.

**Rightness of divine judgment, vv. 4 cd (MT, 6 cd).**

“so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.” David clearly acknowledges the correctness of God’s sentence on him for his actions. With the Bathsheba affair, this involved the death of the newborn infant conceived in adultery as described in [2 Sam. 12:15b-23](#). But ultimately the declaration affirms the correctness of all of God’s judgments imposed on sinners. The psalmist acknowledges this; the confessing sinner must as well.

**Confession of sinfulness, vv. 5-6 (MT, 7-8).** “5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. 6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.”

The psalmist acknowledges that his sinful conduct reaches deep down into his very being, his sinful nature that he gained at birth. Down through

the centuries, various meanings have been attached to verse five. Most common has been to see sexual sin as the archetypal sin and connect it to Genesis three with the birth of the sons of Adam after their parent’s sin in the Garden of Eden. But Tate (*WBC, Logos Systems*) calls attention to a better understanding:

The passage is more commonly understood today as a confession of the essential human condition of the speaker. “One is a sinner simply as a result of one’s natural human descent” (W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I, 268). Closely related to this approach is what may be called the social view. “It is the tragedy of man that he is born into a world full of sin” (Weiser, 405; also A. A. Anderson, 395). No

particular sinfulness of the mother or the process of conception is involved. The emphasis is on the sin of the speaker, who admits that sin has been “no freak event” (Kidner, 190), but goes back to the roots of personal existence (see Ps 58:3). Thus the psalm reflects acceptance of the understanding that human life always involves sin and guilt (see Gen 8:21; Job 14:4; 15:14–16; 25:4; Ps 143:2; John 3:6; Kraus, 544).

We **are** sinners; not, we **become** sinners! And this has been true since the first moment of consciousness at birth. David acknowledges this fundamental trait of human existence.

Further, David affirms that confession means “coming clean” with God from deep down inside our very being. “Truth” is a reflection of God’s character. That truth must penetrate down into one’s “inward being” wherein lies his “secret heart.” The precise meaning of these two key terms, along with the two strophes here, is very uncertain. Compare the following translations of verse six:

NASB. “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.”

NRSV. “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.”

NLT. “But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.”

NIV. “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you



teach me wisdom in the inmost place.”

TNIV. “Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.”

TEV. “Sincerity and truth are what you require; fill my mind with your wisdom.”

Message. “What you’re after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.”

The psalmist seems to be affirming the saturation of the very deepest part of his being with the divine truth so that out of that understanding, “wisdom,” will come renewal of life, a life lived in obedience to God, rather than in rebellion.

### Prayer for forgiveness, vv. 7, 9 (MT, 9, 11).

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”; “Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”

Hyssop was seen as a powerful cleansing agent, and was prescribed for those coming in contact with lepers and with dead bodies (cf. Lev. 14; Num. 19). In traditional Hebrew command / promise structure, these two parallel strophes in verse 7 affirm the plea for divine cleansing:

“Purge me with hyssop,  
and I shall be clean;  
wash me,  
and I shall be whiter than snow”

God’s cleansing of the sinner thoroughly removes the presence of sin. Verse 9 affirms the same essential idea but with an emphasis on the guilt of the sin.

“Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.”

Once more synonymous parallelism is the nature of these two lines. Tate (WBC, Logos Systems) notes:

The background of the expression relating to



God’s hiding his face seems to be rooted in the idea of a deity turning away in rejection and separation from a suppliant. Balentine (44) points out that “hide the face” was a part of the common religious

language of the ancient Near East. The prayer in v 11 is for God to separate himself in a gracious self-alienation from the suppliant’s sins — a startling concept of forgiveness. The “blot out” in the parallel colon of v 11 draws attention back to the same words in v 3.

What do these verses have to do with us today? Plenty! Through them we are reminded of the indescribable “sinfulness of sin.” Sin is iniquity; iniquity is transgression of divine law. All of it pervades not just superficial human action. Rather it penetrates down to the very depths of our being. And it has always been a part of our existence, from birth onward.

Thus seeking God’s cleansing of this awful cancer that permeates our lives is serious business. We must come before God with a clear sense of both who we are and what we have done against Him. Causal and flippant attitudes won’t get the job done. James had it right in his declaration about repentance (Jas. 4:9): “Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection.” These are but expressions of our humbling ourselves before God as he discusses in 4:7-11.

Also the promise of God’s forgiveness that brings cleansing is affirmed here. When God cleans us up He takes lye soap and does the job thoroughly. We come out “clean as a whistle.” In that comes hope and joy.



### b. Restoration & promise, vv. 8, 10-19

#### Hebrew Text

תְּשַׁמְּעֵנִי שְׁשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְחָה תִּגְלָנָה<sup>10</sup> וּמִשְׁלַג אֲלֹבִין:  
עֲצָמוֹת דָּקִית: ... לֵב<sup>12</sup>  
טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן חֲדָשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי:<sup>13</sup>  
אֶל־תְּשַׁלֵּכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ אֶל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי:<sup>14</sup> הַשִּׁיבָה  
לִי שְׁשׁוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי:<sup>15</sup> אֶל־מִדְּרָה פִּשְׁעִים  
דְּרָכֶיךָ וְחַטָּאִים אֲלֵיךָ יָשׁוּבוּ:<sup>16</sup> תַּצִּילֵנִי מִדְּמִים אֱלֹהִים



אֱלֹהֵי תְשׁוּעָתִי תִרְנֶן לְשׁוֹנִי צִדְקָתְךָ: <sup>17</sup> אֲדַנִּי שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי  
יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ: <sup>18</sup> כִּי לֹא־תִחַפֵּץ זִבַּח וְאַתָּנָה עֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה:  
<sup>19</sup> זִבְחִי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נְשַׁבְּרָה לִב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא  
תִבְזֶה: <sup>20</sup> הִיטִיבָה בְּרִצּוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חֳמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם: <sup>21</sup>  
אֲזִ תִּחַפֵּץ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק עֹלָה וְכֹלִיל אֲזִ יַעֲלוּ עַל־מִזְבִּיחֶךָ פְּרִים:

## LXX

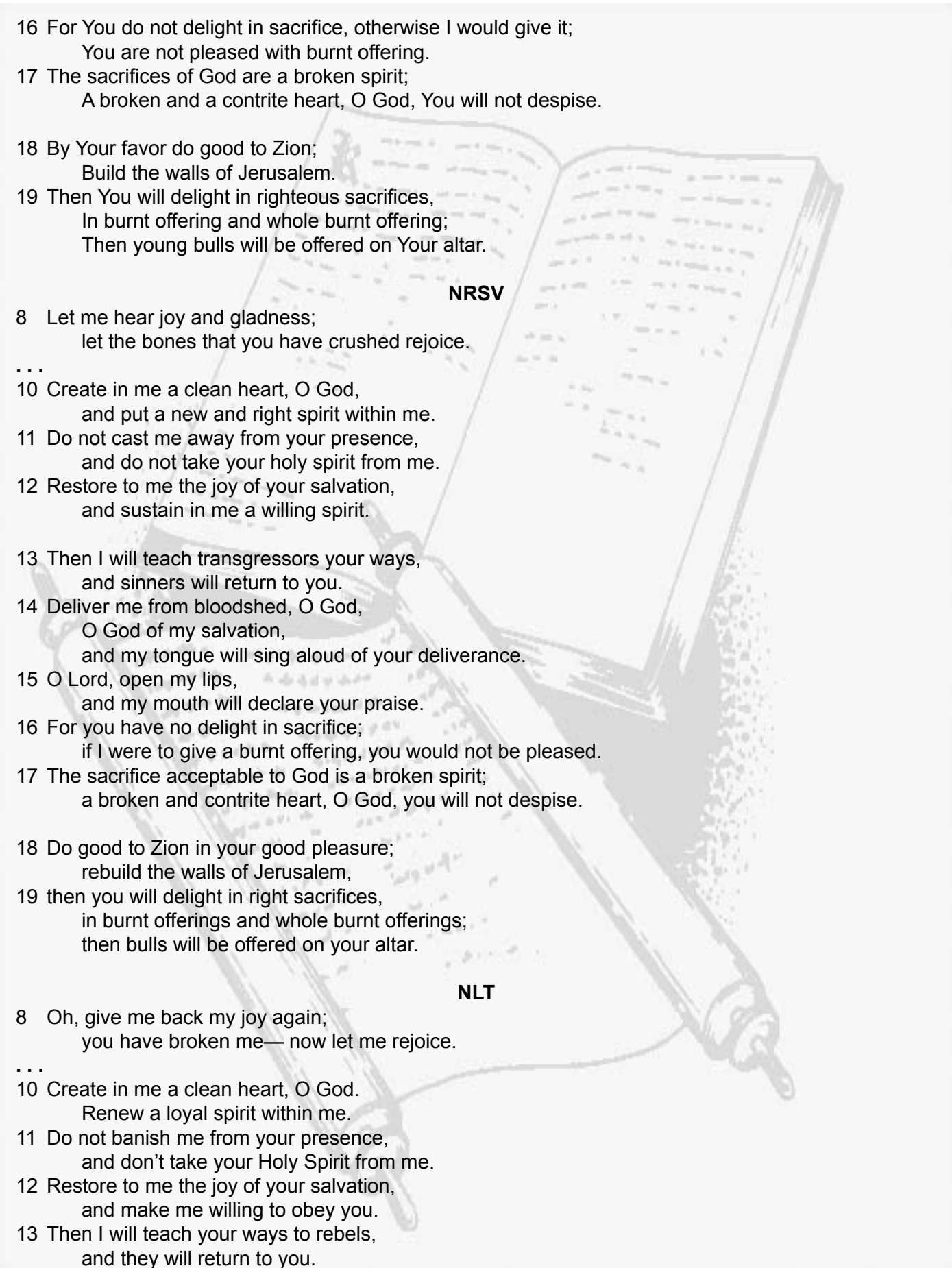
LXT Psalm 50:10 ἀκουτιεῖς με ἀγαλλιάσιν καὶ εὐφροσύνην ἀγαλλιάσονται ὅστᾳ τεταπεινωμένα . . . <sup>12</sup> καρδίαν  
καθαράν κτίσιν ἐν ἐμοί ὁ θεός καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισιν ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου <sup>13</sup> μὴ ἀπορρίψης με  
ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου σου καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιόν σου μὴ ἀντανέλης ἀπ' ἐμοῦ <sup>14</sup> ἀπόδος μοι τὴν ἀγαλλίασιν  
τοῦ σωτηρίου σου καὶ πνεύματι ἡγεμονικῶ στήρισόν με <sup>15</sup> διδάξω ἀνόμους τὰς ὁδοὺς σου καὶ ἀσεβεῖς  
ἐπὶ σὲ ἐπιστρέψουσιν <sup>16</sup> ῥύσαί με ἐξ αἱμάτων ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς τῆς σωτηρίας μου ἀγαλλιάσεται ἡ γλῶσσά  
μου τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου <sup>17</sup> κύριε τὰ χεῖλή μου ἀνοίξεις καὶ τὸ στόμα μου ἀναγγελεῖ τὴν αἴνεσίν σου <sup>18</sup>  
ὅτι εἰ ἠθέλησας θυσίαν ἔδωκα ἂν ὀλοκαυτώματα οὐκ εὐδοκήσεις <sup>19</sup> θυσία τῷ θεῷ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον  
καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπεινωμένην ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἐξουθενώσει <sup>20</sup> ἀγάθυνον κύριε ἐν τῇ εὐδοκίᾳ  
σου τὴν Σιών καὶ οἰκοδομηθήτω τὰ τεῖχη Ἱερουσαλὴμ <sup>21</sup> τότε εὐδοκήσεις θυσίαν δικαιοσύνης ἀναφορὰν  
καὶ ὀλοκαυτώματα τότε ἀνοίσουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριόν σου μόσχους

## NASB

- 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
- ...
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners will be converted to You.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;  
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,  
That my mouth may declare Your praise.

### <sup>1</sup>Transliterated Hebrew Text

- <sup>10</sup> tašmī'ēnī šāsōn wəšimḥā<sup>h</sup> tāgēlnā<sup>h</sup> 'āšāmōt dikkīṭā<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>11</sup> hastēr pāne'kā mēḥāṭā'āy wəkol-'āwōnōṭāy məḥē<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>12</sup> lēb ṭāhōr bārā'-lī 'ēlōhīm wərū<sup>h</sup> nākōn ḥaddēš baqirbī<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>13</sup> 'al-tašlīkēnī milləpāne'kā wərū<sup>h</sup> qodšəkā 'al-tiqqah mimménnī<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>14</sup> ḥāšībā<sup>h</sup> lī šāsōn yiš'ekā wərū<sup>h</sup> nədībā<sup>h</sup> tisməkēnī<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>15</sup> 'ālammadā<sup>h</sup> pōš'im dərāke'kā wəḥaṭṭā'im 'ēle'kā yāšūbū<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>16</sup> ḥaššilēnī middāmīm 'ēlōhīm 'ēlōhē təšū'atī tərannēn ləšōnī šidqāte'kā<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>17</sup> 'ādōnāy šəpāṭay tiptāḥ ūpī yaggīd təhillāte'kā<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>18</sup> kī lō'-taḥpōš zəbaḥ wə'ettēnā<sup>h</sup> 'ōlā<sup>h</sup> lō' tīrše<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>19</sup> zibḥē 'ēlōhīm rū<sup>h</sup> nišbārā<sup>h</sup> lēb-nišbār wənidke<sup>h</sup> 'ēlōhīm lō' tībze<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>20</sup> ḥēṭībā<sup>h</sup> bīršōnkā 'et-siyyōn tībne<sup>h</sup> ḥōmōt yərūšālāim<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>21</sup> 'āz taḥpōš zibḥē-šedeq 'ōlā<sup>h</sup> wəkālil 'āz ya'ālū 'al-mizbahākā pārim<sup>h</sup>

- 
- 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;  
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
- 18 By Your favor do good to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,  
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

**NRSV**

- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- ...
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
- 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

**NLT**

- 8 Oh, give me back my joy again;  
you have broken me— now let me rejoice.
- ...
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
Renew a loyal spirit within me.
- 11 Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.
- 13 Then I will teach your ways to rebels,  
and they will return to you.



- 14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;  
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.
- 15 Unseal my lips, O Lord,  
that my mouth may praise you.
- 16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.  
You do not want a burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.  
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.
- 18 Look with favor on Zion and help her;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—  
with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.  
Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

### Notes:

The structural pattern of these verses is broken down by Tate (WBC, Logos Systems), using the Hebrew verse numbering, as follows:

Prayer for restoration	vv 10, 12–14
Vow to teach sinners	v 15
Prayer for the ability to praise	vv 16–19

Vv 20–21 form an addendum.

This provides a way to open up the text for better understanding.

**Prayer for restoration, vv. 8, 10-12.** “8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice....10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

In the psalmist's prayer for forgiveness he asks for the revival of joy in his life through forgiveness.

*Let me hear joy and gladness;*

*let the bones that you have crushed rejoice*

In sin comes guilt and with guilt comes loss of joy, real joy. The plea was that through God's forgiveness he would experience the return of joy and gladness in his life. The moment of being forgiven brings a horrific sense of profound joy and sense of well being.

The second line is often thought to suppose some kind of physical injury as a consequence of the psalmist's sin. If so, then the plea is for physical healing as a part of the restoration. Tate (WBC, Logos Systems) notes:

The “crushed bones” of v 10b may refer to an illness which has made the suppliant acutely aware of personal sinfulness, or it may refer to mental and

spiritual distress caused by guilt. The word “bones” (עצמות) occurs with ideas of health and well-being (e.g., Ps 34:21; Job 20:11; Prov 15:30; Isa 66:14) as well as with ideas of sickness or woe (e.g., Pss 6:3; 32:2; 38:4; Job 30:30; 38:4); the plural is used as a collective term for the limbs of the body (Judg 19:29; Pss 31:10–11; 32:3; Job 33:19). The “bones you crushed” may be only a strong statement of overpowering spiritual remorse, though this could certainly involve psychosomatic elements in most biblical contexts. In any case, the speaker is confident that God could make the crushed bones “rejoice” (לִיֵּן). The NEB catches the spirit of v 10b, “Let the bones dance which thou hast broken.”

Then comes a series of requests for restoration to proper relationship with God.

First there is recognition of the renewal that must take place inwardly:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,*

*and put a new and right spirit within me.*

A deep sense of being spiritual clean goes hand in hand with the proper attitude about life and God.

Then follows the plea to be allowed to remain in God's presence:

*Do not cast me away from your presence,*

*and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

The psalmist fully understood that living in the presence of God meant life and happiness. In that divine presence one experiences the Spirit of God active and powerful in his life. The reference to “holy spirit” should not be taken as particularly trinitarian, as Tate (WBC, Logos Systems) observes:

“Your holy spirit” (דְּשִׁדֵּק חֹר) is an unusual expression that is found elsewhere in the MT only in Isa 63:10, 11 (cf. Wis 9:17); though “your good



spirit” is in Neh 9:20 (cf. “an evil spirit,” 1 Sam 16:14; “spirit of wisdom,” 1 Sam 11:2). Various connotations emerge when “spirit” is associated with God. The spirit is sometimes God’s creative power (see 33:6; also Job 33:4; Jdt 16:14; Wis 1:7). The life-giving power of the divine spirit is a form of creation (Ps 104:27–30; Job 34:14–15; Ezek 37:9–14). A few texts link רוּחַ so clearly with God that the operation of the spirit is equivalent to the action of God, and the spirit seems identical with the personality of God in some cases. The transcendent realm of God is spirit and not flesh.

The sinner in cleansing is worthy to stand in the very presence of Almighty God and to experience that presence as a life changing power.

*Finally*, the psalmist returns to the theme of joy as a central ingredient of restoration:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

God’s deliverance brings joy. And the psalmist requests that God sustain in him a consistent commitment to walk God’s paths in obedience.

What a restoration is sought after here! Joy, renewal, healing, divine presence, willing spirit -- all pointing to a new life to be lived before God.

**Vow to teach sinners, v. 13.** “13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”

In light of the anticipated restoration, the psalmist promises to teach others the ways of God and to help them return to God as he has done. Ministry always evolves out of finding renewal with God. The “transgressors” and “sinners” for David were his fellow countrymen who had strayed from the Laws of God.

The need for continual instruction in the ways of God never diminishes. God’s people need always to seek to help others find their way to God.

**Prayer for the ability to praise, vv. 14-17.** “14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

This second section of the prayer comes to a

close with a series of petitions focusing on worship.

*First*, comes the plea / promise of singing God’s praises:

Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your  
deliverance.

In the assumption that this part originates with David, the language would reach back to the death of Uriah, as Tesh and Zorn (*College Press NIV Commentary*, Logos Systems) contend:

This, in reality, is another confession of his sin by David. He makes no attempt to evade the truth that the blood of Uriah is on his hands. He pleads that he may be spared the death penalty for having committed the crime.

But with the liturgical use of the psalm in temple worship later the meaning broadens, as Tate (WBC, Logos Systems) notes:

On the surface, at least, neither blood-guilt nor bloodshed seems to fit the context in Ps 51. References to enemies or violence are missing from the psalm. The use of “bloods” could, of course, be the result of the composition of the psalm with David in mind (see above; and note the concern of David for the removal of blood-guilt in 2 Sam 3:28–29; 1 Kgs 2:31–33; also 2 Sam 16:7, 8). A better approach may be along the line of “bloods” as a figurative expression which does not require reference to actual bloodshed or even to “bloodthirstiness” (see the study by N. A. Van Uchelen, “יָשָׁן in the Psalms,” *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 15 [1969], 205–12). See Prov 12:6; 29:10; Pss 5:7; 26:9–10; 55:22, 24; Lev 19:19 (cf. Ezek 22:6–12; also Acts 20:26–27).

Perhaps the best interpretation in 51:16 is that of “deadly guilt” — guilt for which one could be held responsible unto death (as in Ezek 3:17–19; 33:7–9; the prophet is made answerable for the “blood” — life/death — of his people; cf. Pss 9:13; 30:10). This meaning fits well with the emphasis on the inadequacy of sacrifice in v 18. The murderer cannot be ransomed except by his or her own blood, according to Num 35:30–34 (because bloodshed pollutes the land). Also, see the discussion below of sin with a “high hand” in Num 15:30. Thus the guilt confessed in Ps 51 reaches its climax in the deadly guilt of v 16. No actual bloodshed may be





involved at all, but the guilt is too great for normal means of atonement. God must deliver and loose the tongue, lips, and mouth to sing out praise of the divine power and grace.

**Second**, there comes the petition for God to “open the lips” of the psalmist to sing God’s praises:

O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

This command / promise structure makes a request that is followed by a promise. The thrust of this is helpfully summarized by Tate (*WBC*, Logos Systems):

Two ideas are conveyed. First, the suppliant prays to be released from the restrictive results of guilt, the condition of “one whose conscience has shamed him into silence” (Kidner, 193) and who has been cut off from freedom to worship (cf. Ezek 16:13). God’s forgiveness would break the seal of guilt and give new joy (cf. 30:11–13; Ezek 3:26–27; 33:22). Second, the prayer is for an empowerment of speaking ability in order to teach and give testimony, which cannot be done adequately without divine help (cf. Jer 1:4–10). A somewhat parallel idea is that of God putting a new song in the mouth of one who has been delivered (40:4; also, Balaam’s ass in Num 22:28; cf. Dan 10:16; Jer 1:9).

Finally a series of declarations are given that stand as the theological basis for the preceding petitions:

For you have no delight in sacrifice;

if I were to give a burnt offering,  
you would not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Clearly the later prophetic disdain for the temple sacrifices offered merely externally and without profound inner experience is underscored here. The external action without the inner change becomes worthless before God. James Mayes (*Interpretation*, Logos Systems) understands this to not be opposed to temple sacrifices in principle:

Verse 16 is probably not a rejection of sacrifice

as such; rather, it is a way of saying that sacrifice is not what God wants from the sinner (see Psalm 50). Sacrifice of animals as the essential way to deal with one’s sinfulness is, however, relativized. That God turns to and accepts the broken and contrite heart/spirit rather than sacrifice is announced by the prophet who speaks in Isaiah 66:1–4; see also Isaiah 57:15–21 and 61:1.

**Addendum, vv. 18-19.** “18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.”

The final two verses probably reflect the later post-exilic view of Nehemiah who set out to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem at the return of the exiles from Babylon. Tate (*WBC*, Logos Systems) notes:

The last two verses of the psalm were added by a later reviser who wanted to interpret the psalm in terms of Israel’s corporate experience and also to correct any absolutely anticlitactic interpretation of vv 18–19.

The form is that of a prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem so that sacrifices could be made on the altar in the temple. God is asked to “do good to Zion” in his “good pleasure” (וְצֶדֶק, which means “will” when used of God, Pss 40:9; 103:21; 143:10; Ezek 10:11, and of men, Dan 8:4; 11:3, 16, 36; Neh 9:24; Esth 1:8; 9:5). However, it can also be used of God with the nuance of “favor” or

“grace” (Pss 5:12; 30:6, 8; 89:18; 106:4; Prov 8:35; 12:2; 18:22), and in this verse it should be understood as something like “in your gracious will.”

What do these verses have to say to us today? Again, quite a lot. Spiritual restoration is central to a vital Christian life. Times of renewal always flow into our lives as an ongoing need. Restoration comes only when things are cleaned up on the inside of us. Mere outward acts of worship won’t get the job done. In fact, if they are done without the proper inner spirit, our very acts of worship become offensive to God.

Critical to worship and praise is living in the continual presence of God. Also, ministry to others in helping them find restoration is a natural outgrowth of one’s own experience of renewal and restoration before God.



## Texts

WTT Psalm 51:1 לַמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד׃<sup>2</sup> בָּבוֹא־אֵלָיו נָתַן הַנָּבִיא  
כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בַּת־שֹׁבַע׃<sup>3</sup> חָנְנִי אֱלֹהִים כַּחֲסִדְךָ כְּרַב רַחֲמֶיךָ  
מִחַה פִּשְׁעֵי׃<sup>4</sup> (הַרְבֵּה) [הֶרֶב] כַּבֵּסְנִי מַעוֹנִי וּמַחְטְאֹתַי טְהַרְנִי׃<sup>5</sup>  
כִּי־פִשְׁעֵי אָנֹכִי אָדַע וּחַטְאֹתַי נִגְדִי תָמִיד׃<sup>6</sup> לֵךְ לְבִדְךָ׃ חַטְאֹתַי  
וְהָרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי לְמַעַן תִּצְדַּק בְּדַבְרְךָ תִּזְכֶּה בִּשְׁפָטֶךָ׃<sup>7</sup>  
הֵן־בְּעֵוֹן חוֹלַלְתִּי וּבְחַטָּא יַחַמְתָּנִי אֱמִי׃<sup>8</sup> הֵן־אֵמֶת חַפְצָתְךָ  
בְּטַחֲוֹת וּבִסְתֵּם חֲכָמָה תוֹדִיעֵנִי׃<sup>9</sup> תַּחַטְּאֵנִי בְּאֲזוּב וְאַטְהַר  
תְּכַבֵּסְנִי וּמִשְׁלֹג אֲלַבֶּיךָ׃<sup>10</sup> תִּשְׁמִיעֵנִי שִׁשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְחָה תִּגְלֶנָּה  
עֲצָמוֹת דִּכְיָת׃<sup>11</sup> הַסֵּתֵר פָּנֶיךָ מִחַטְּאֵי וְכֹל־עֲוֹנֹתַי מִחַה׃<sup>12</sup> לֵב  
טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן חֲדַשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי׃<sup>13</sup>  
אַל־תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קְדֹשְׁךָ אַל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי׃<sup>14</sup> הִשִּׁיבָה  
לִי שִׁשׁוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי׃<sup>15</sup> אֲלַמְּדָה פִּשְׁעִים  
דִּרְכֶיךָ וּחַטְּאִים אֲלִיךָ יָשׁוּבוּ׃<sup>16</sup> הַצִּילֵנִי מִדְּמִים׃ אֱלֹהִים  
אֱלֹהֵי תְשׁוּעָתִי תִרְנֵן לְשׁוֹנִי צְדָקָתְךָ׃<sup>17</sup> אֲדַנִּי שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתַּח וּפִי  
יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ׃<sup>18</sup> כִּי׃ לֹא־תִחַפֵּץ זִבַּח וְאַתָּנָה עוֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה׃  
<sup>19</sup> זִבְחִי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁבָּרָה לִב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא  
תִבְזֶה׃<sup>20</sup> הִיטִיבָה בְּרִצּוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם׃<sup>21</sup>  
אֲזִי תִחַפֵּץ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק עוֹלָה וְכֹלִיל אֲזִי יַעֲלוּ עַל־מִזְבִּיחַךָ פָּרִים׃

## Transliterated Hebrew Text

BHT Psalm 51:1 lamnaṣṣē<sup>a</sup>h mizmôr ləḏāwīd

<sup>2</sup> bəḇô<sup>ʔ</sup>-ēlāyw nātān hannābî<sup>ʔ</sup> ka<sup>ʔ</sup>āšer-bā<sup>ʔ</sup> el-bat-šāba<sup>ʕ</sup>

<sup>3</sup> honnēnî ʔēlōhīm kəḥasdēkā kərōb raḥāme<sup>ʔ</sup>kā məḥē<sup>h</sup> pəšā<sup>ʕ</sup>ay

<sup>4</sup> (harbē<sup>h</sup>) [hereb] kabbəsēnî mē<sup>ʕ</sup>awōnî ûmēḥattā<sup>ʔ</sup>tî ṭahārēnî

<sup>5</sup> kî-pəšā<sup>ʕ</sup>ay ʔānî ʔēdā<sup>ʕ</sup> wəḥattā<sup>ʔ</sup>tî neġdî ṭāmîd

<sup>6</sup> ləkā ləbaddəkā ḥātā<sup>ʔ</sup>tî wəhāra<sup>ʕ</sup> bə<sup>ʕ</sup>ēne<sup>ʔ</sup>kā ʕāsītî ləma<sup>ʕ</sup>an tišdaq bəḏobrékā  
tizke<sup>h</sup> bəšōṭṭekā

<sup>7</sup> hēn-bə<sup>ʕ</sup>awōn ḥôlāl<sup>ʔ</sup>tî ûbəḥēt<sup>ʔ</sup> yəḥēmātnî ʔimmî

<sup>8</sup> hēn-ʔēmet ḥāpāštā battūḥôt ûbəsātūm ḥokmā<sup>h</sup> tōdî<sup>ʕ</sup>ēnî

<sup>9</sup> təḥattə<sup>ʕ</sup>ēnî bə<sup>ʕ</sup>ēzōb wə<sup>ʕ</sup>ethār təkabbəsēnî ûmiššéleġ ʔalbîn

<sup>10</sup> tašmî<sup>ʕ</sup>ēnî sāsôn wəsimḥā<sup>h</sup> tāġēlnā<sup>h</sup> ʕāšāmôt dikkîṭā

<sup>11</sup> hastēr pāne<sup>ʔ</sup>kā mēḥātā<sup>ʔ</sup>ay wəkol-ʕawōnōṭāy məḥē<sup>h</sup>

<sup>12</sup> lēb t̄āhōr b̄erā<sup>3</sup>-lī ʾēlōhīm w̄erū<sup>a</sup>h nākōn ḥaddēš b̄eqirbī  
<sup>13</sup> ʾal-tašlīkēnī milləpāne<sup>ʿ</sup>kā w̄erū<sup>a</sup>h qodšəkā ʾal-tiqqah mimmēnnī  
<sup>14</sup> hāšībā<sup>h</sup> llī šəsōn yiš<sup>ʿ</sup>ekā w̄erū<sup>a</sup>h nədībā<sup>h</sup> t̄isməkēnī  
<sup>15</sup> ʾālamədā<sup>h</sup> pōš<sup>ʿ</sup>im d̄erāke<sup>ʿ</sup>kā wəḥattāʾim ʾele<sup>ʿ</sup>kā yāšūbū  
<sup>16</sup> haššīlēnī middāmīm ʾēlōhīm ʾēlōhē t̄əšū<sup>ʿ</sup>ātī t̄ərannēn l̄əšōnī šidqātēkā  
<sup>17</sup> ʾādōnāy šəpātay t̄iptāh ūpī yaggīd t̄əhillātēkā  
<sup>18</sup> kī lō<sup>3</sup>-t̄ahpōš zebah wəʾettēnā<sup>h</sup> ʿōlā<sup>h</sup> lō<sup>3</sup> t̄irše<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>19</sup> zibhē ʾēlōhīm rū<sup>a</sup>h nišbārā<sup>h</sup> lēb-nišbār wənīdke<sup>h</sup> ʾēlōhīm lō<sup>3</sup> t̄ibze<sup>h</sup>  
<sup>20</sup> hētībā<sup>h</sup> b̄iršōnkā ʾet-šiyyōn t̄ibne<sup>h</sup> ḥōmōt yərūšālāim  
<sup>21</sup> ʾāz t̄ahpōš zibhē-šedeq ʿōlā<sup>h</sup> wəkālīl ʾāz ya<sup>ʿ</sup>ālū ʿal-mizbahākā p̄arīm

## LXX

<sup>LXT</sup> Psalm 50:1 εἰς τὸ τέλος ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ <sup>2</sup> ἐν τῷ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ναθαν τὸν προφήτην  
 ἡνίκα εἰσηλθεν πρὸς Βηρσαβε <sup>3</sup> ἐλέησόν με ὁ θεὸς κατὰ τὸ μέγα ἔλεός σου καὶ κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν  
 οἰκτιρμῶν σου ἐξάλειψον τὸ ἀνόμημά μου <sup>4</sup> ἐπὶ πλεῖον πλυνόν με ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνομίας μου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς  
 ἁμαρτίας μου καθάρισόν με <sup>5</sup> ὅτι τὴν ἀνομίαν μου ἐγὼ γινώσκω καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία μου ἐνώπιόν μου  
 ἐστίν διὰ παντός <sup>6</sup> σοὶ μόνῳ ἥμαρτον καὶ τὸ ποιηρὸν ἐνώπιόν σου ἐποίησα ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῇς  
 ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου καὶ νικήσῃς ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε <sup>7</sup> ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήμφθην καὶ ἐν  
 ἁμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέν με ἡ μήτηρ μου <sup>8</sup> ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀλήθειαν ἠγάπησας τὰ ἄδηλα καὶ τὰ κρύφια τῆς  
 σοφίας σου ἐδήλωσάς μοι <sup>9</sup> ῥαντιεῖς με ὑσσώπῳ καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι πλυνεῖς με καὶ ὑπὲρ χιόνα  
 λευκανθήσομαι <sup>10</sup> ἀκουτιεῖς με ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ εὐφροσύνην ἀγαλλιάσονται ὅστ᾽ αὐταπεινωμένα  
<sup>11</sup> ἀπόστρεψον τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν μου καὶ πάσας τὰς ἀνομίας μου ἐξάλειψον <sup>12</sup>  
 καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοί ὁ θεὸς καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισον ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου <sup>13</sup> μὴ  
 ἀπορρίψῃς με ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου σου καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιόν σου μὴ ἀντανέλῃς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ <sup>14</sup> ἀπόδος  
 μοι τὴν ἀγαλλίασιν τοῦ σωτηρίου σου καὶ πνεύματι ἡγεμονικῶς στήρισόν με <sup>15</sup> διδάξω ἀνόμους τὰς  
 ὁδοὺς σου καὶ ἀσεβεῖς ἐπὶ σὲ ἐπιστρέψουσιν <sup>16</sup> ῥύσαι με ἐξ αἱμάτων ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς τῆς σωτηρίας  
 μου ἀγαλλιᾶσεται ἡ γλῶσσά μου τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου <sup>17</sup> κύριε τὰ χεῖλη μου ἀνοίξεις καὶ τὸ στόμα  
 μου ἀναγγελεῖ τὴν αἰνέσιν σου <sup>18</sup> ὅτι εἰ ἠθέλησας θυσίαν ἔδωκα ἂν ὀλοκαυτώματα οὐκ εὐδοκήσεις  
<sup>19</sup> θυσία τῷ θεῷ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπεινωμένην ὁ θεὸς οὐκ  
 ἐξουθενώσει <sup>20</sup> ἀγάθυνον κύριε ἐν τῇ εὐδοκίᾳ σου τὴν Σιών καὶ οἰκοδομηθήτω τὰ τεῖχη Ἱερουσαλὴμ  
<sup>21</sup> τότε εὐδοκήσεις θυσίαν δικαιοσύνης ἀναφορὰν καὶ ὀλοκαυτώματα τότε ἀνοίσουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ  
 θυσιαστήριόν σου μόσχους

## NASB

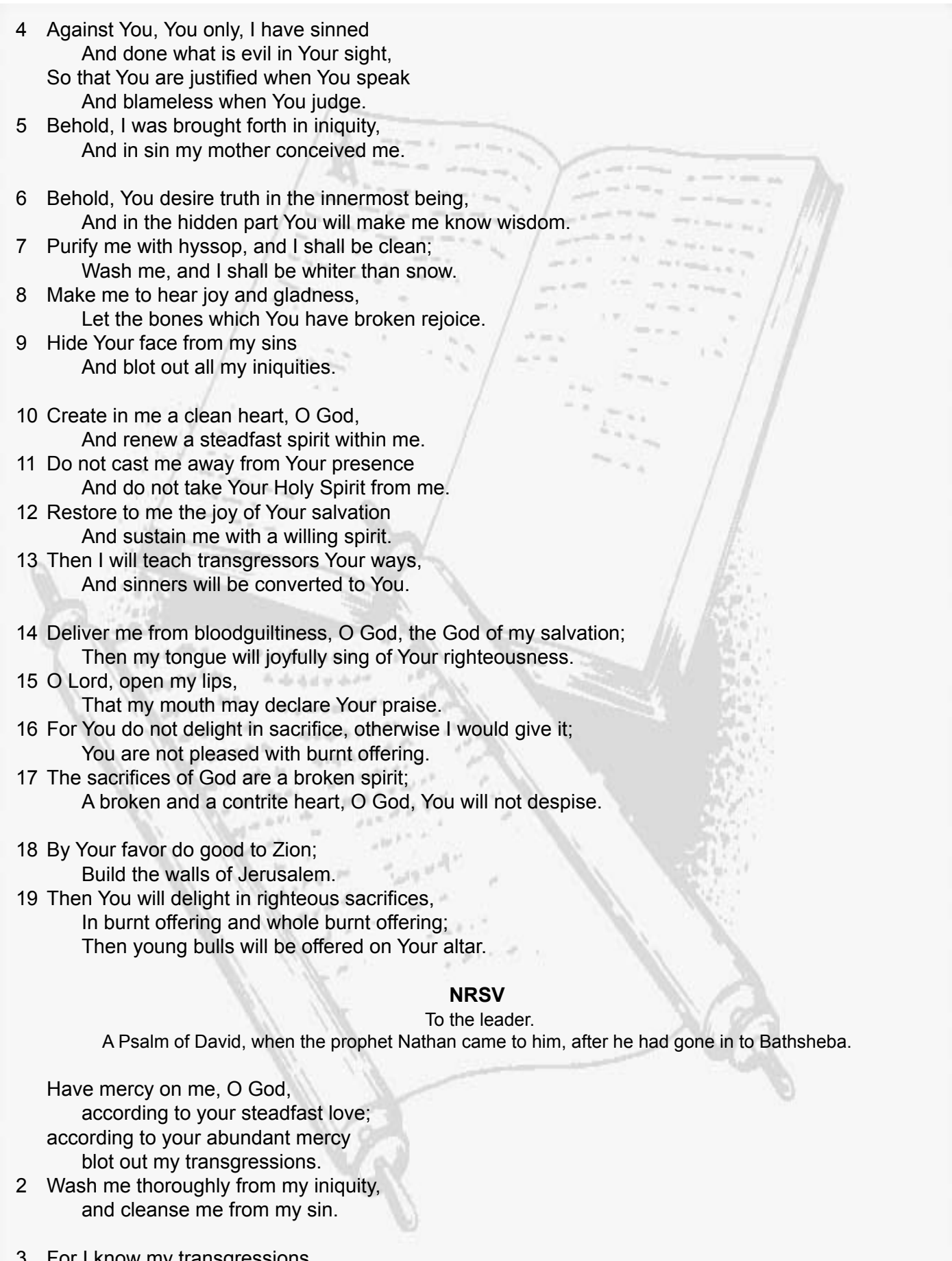
For the choir director. A Psalm of David,  
 when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;  
 According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity  
 And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,  
 And my sin is ever before me.



- 
- 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.
- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,  
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
- 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
- 9 Hide Your face from my sins  
And blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners will be converted to You.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;  
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,  
That my mouth may declare Your praise.
- 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;  
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
- 18 By Your favor do good to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,  
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

**NRSV**

To the leader.

A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

- Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is ever before me.

- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5 Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- 6 You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
- 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

#### **NLT**

For the choir director: A psalm of David,  
regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him  
after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

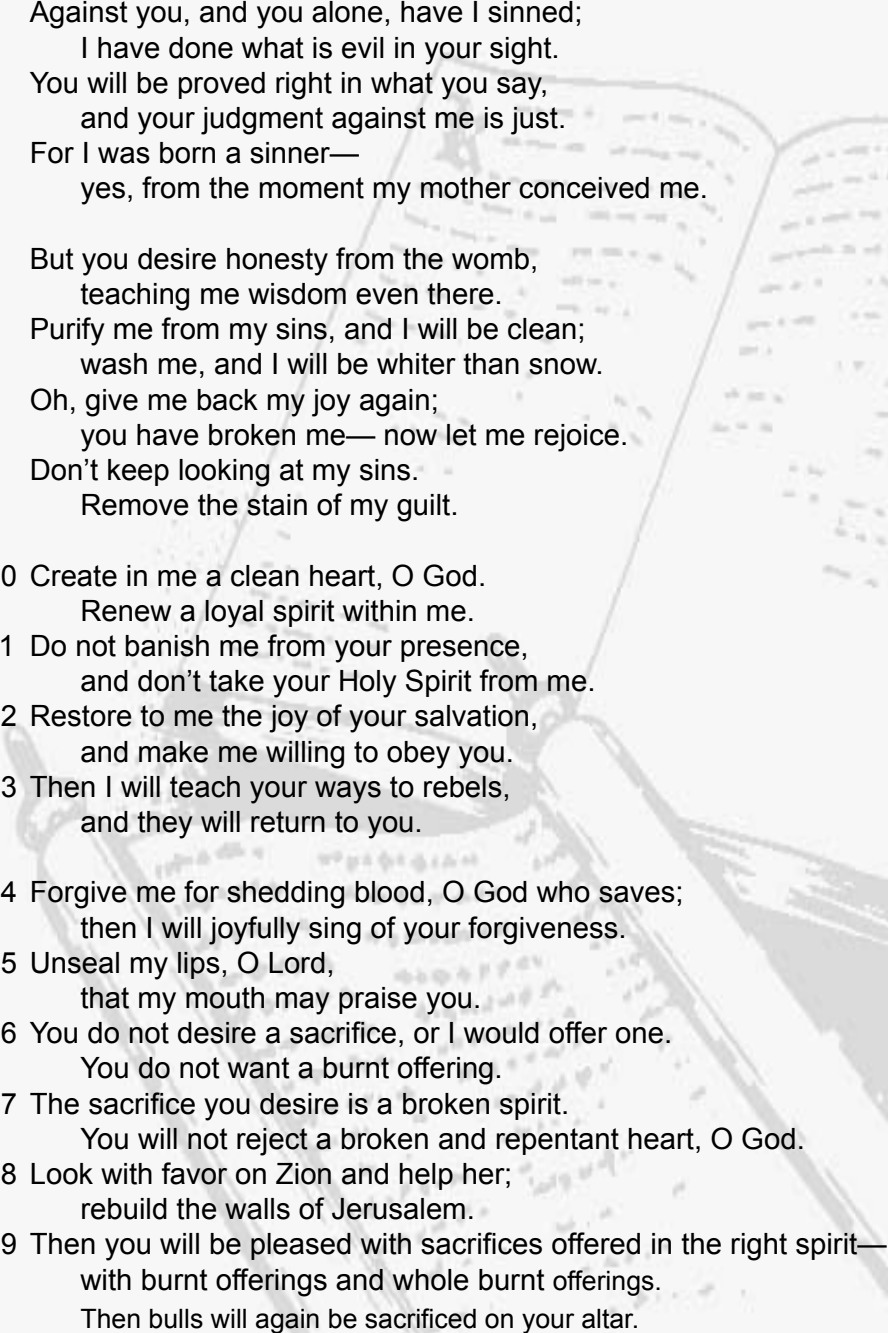
Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.

Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.

- 2 Wash me clean from my guilt.  
Purify me from my sin.
- 3 For I recognize my rebellion;



it haunts me day and night.

- 
- 4 Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;  
I have done what is evil in your sight.  
You will be proved right in what you say,  
and your judgment against me is just.
- 5 For I was born a sinner—  
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.
- 6 But you desire honesty from the womb,  
teaching me wisdom even there.
- 7 Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- 8 Oh, give me back my joy again;  
you have broken me— now let me rejoice.
- 9 Don't keep looking at my sins.  
Remove the stain of my guilt.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
Renew a loyal spirit within me.
- 11 Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.
- 13 Then I will teach your ways to rebels,  
and they will return to you.
- 14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;  
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.
- 15 Unseal my lips, O Lord,  
that my mouth may praise you.
- 16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.  
You do not want a burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.  
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.
- 18 Look with favor on Zion and help her;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—  
with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.  
Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.