



## OVERVIEW

**Author:** King David  
(c. 1040-970 BC)

### Outline:

Petition for Holy Absolution (v. 1–2)  
Confession of Guilt (v. 3–6)  
Further Petitions for Absolution (v. 7–12)  
The Sanctified Life (v. 13–15)  
The Sacrifices of God (v. 16–19)

### St. Augustine on Psalm 51:

"Prosperity is more perilous to soul than adversity to body... Something useful is tribulation; useful the surgeon's lancet rather than the devil's temptation," (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII:70).

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## Around the Word BIBLE STUDY

Lententide, 2015

# The Penitential Psalms Psalm 51

### PSALM 51

*To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

- <sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your | steadfast love;\*  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my trans- | gressions.
- <sup>2</sup>**Wash me thoroughly from my in- | iquity,\*  
and cleanse me | from my sin!**
- <sup>3</sup>For I know my trans- | gressions,\*  
and my sin is ever be- | fore me.
- <sup>4</sup>**Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil | in your sight,\*  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your | judgment.**
- <sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in in- | iquity,\*  
and in sin did my mother con- | ceive me.
- <sup>6</sup>**Behold, you delight in truth in the inward | be-  
ing,\*  
and you teach me wisdom in the | secret  
heart.**
- <sup>7</sup>Purge me with hyssop, and I | shall be clean;\*  
wash me, and I shall be whit- | er than snow.
- <sup>8</sup>**Let me hear joy and | gladness;\*  
let the bones that you have bro- | ken rejoice.**
- <sup>9</sup>Hide your face | from my sins,\*  
and blot out all my in- | iquities.
- <sup>10</sup>**Create in me a clean heart, | O God,\*  
and renew a right spirit with- | in me.**
- <sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from your | presence,\*  
and take not your Holy Spirit | from me.
- <sup>12</sup>**Restore to me the joy of your sal- | vation,\*  
and uphold me with a willing | spirit.**
- <sup>13</sup>Then I will teach transgressors | your ways,\*  
and sinners will re- | turn to you.
- <sup>14</sup>**Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my sal- | vation,\*  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your | right-  
eousness.**
- <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open | my lips,\*  
and my mouth will de- | clare your praise.
- <sup>16</sup>**For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I  
would | give it;\*  
you will not be pleased with a burnt | offer-  
ing.**
- <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken | spirit;\*

a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will | not despise.

- <sup>18</sup>**Do good to Zion in your good | pleasure;\*  
build up the walls of Je- | rusalem;**
- <sup>19</sup>then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt | offerings;\*  
then bulls will be offered on your | altar.  
**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit.  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

### v. 3: "My sin is ever before me"

Why did God raise up Moses and the Prophets, according to Luke 16:29–31?

Why can't we even boast in the good works we do? See Ephesians 2:8–10.

Luther: "Consequently, even the saints do not boast about their own strengths, although they might delight and rejoice in them by referring them to Him who gave them. Either one is extremely absurd: both to be proud in poverty and to be proud in someone else's clothes," (AE 10:240).

### v. 4: "Against you, you only, have I sinned"

What image does Exodus 34:15–16 use to portray idolatry?

How does Proverbs 30:20 portray those who deny their sinfulness?

How do Christians regard themselves? See 1 Timothy 1:15.

Luther: "Whoever is most beautiful in the sight of God is the most ugly, and, vice versa, whoever is the ugliest is the most beautiful." Compare Mary's *Magnificat* with this Luther quotation (Luke 1:46–55). How does Mary describe herself?

What is the purpose of God's Law? See Romans 3:20. How valuable is this knowledge of sin? See Psalm 119:72.

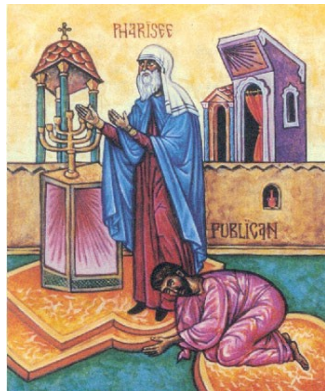
Psalm 51 teaches a godly sort of theft. When you

accuse yourself before God, you steal away Satan's entire reason for being. Why is it good to judge yourself, according to 1 Corinthians 11:31?

How did Saul respond to the rebuke of Samuel? See 1 Samuel 15:19–20. What contrasting approaches to sin do we find in Luke 18:10–13? In Luke 23:39–41?

How does Psalm 40:4 characterize the proud? What, according to 1 John 1:10, is the great lie that the proud tell themselves? What are the qualities of the humble, according to Isaiah 66:2? And finally, in what truth do the humble delight? See John 17:17.

Luther: "Therefore anyone who will not consider himself, or be considered, a sinner, tries to make God a liar and himself the truth. This is the most grievous sin and idolatry of all idolatries," (AE 14:168).



## BIBLE STUDY

## The Penitential Psalms Psalm 51

Romans 5:19. What makes the sin of Christians particularly heinous? See Amos 3:1–2; Deuteronomy 7:6; Luke 12:42–48; Romans 2:9.

### **v. 8: "let the bones that you have broken rejoice"**

What causes our bones to waste away? See Psalm 32:3. What causes our bones to rejoice? See Psalm 32:5. See also Ezekiel 37:4–5. What brings dry, dead bones to life? See Ezekiel 37:4b.

### **v. 9: "and blot out all my iniquities"**

What does God demand of us? See Matthew 5:48. How is this possible? See Ephesians 5:25–27.

Who is the bride of Christ? See Ephesians 5:31–32. What was the bridal price? See Acts 20:28. How does Christ regard Her? See Song 4:7.

### **v. 11: "and take not your Holy Spirit from me"**

This is one of the few places in the Old Testament where the Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned. How does this Psalm describe the forgiveness of sin, especially in verses 2 and 7? How does this correspond to the work of the Holy Spirit? See Titus 3:5–8.

### **v. 13: "Then I will teach transgressors your ways"**

Psalm 51:13 teaches that we cannot sit idly by and watch others go to their ruin. What sin of the Israelites does Amos identify in 6:4–6? What sin did the rich man commit against Lazarus in Luke 16:19–21? What, then, is the answer to Cain's question in Genesis 4:9?

### **v. 15: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise"**

What does God give to us that enables us to declare His praise? See Psalm 116:10. What does St. Paul say about the origin of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:3?

### **v. 18: "build up the walls of Jerusalem"**

What will happen if we are not on guard against false doctrine? See Ephesians 4:14. How does God "build a wall" around His people (Jerusalem) and protect them from false doctrine? See 2 Timothy 1:13. What is the price of impenitence? See Isaiah 5:1–7.

### **v. 19: "then will you delight in right sacrifices"**

God told the Israelites he hated and despised their sacrifices (Amos 5:21–22). Why was this? See Amos 8:4–6. How did God attempt to correct them, and how did the Israelites respond? See Amos 4:6–11.

Why wasn't God pleased with the fasting of the people in Isaiah 58:3–5? What does God expect alongside external acts of worship (such as fasting and offering sacrifices)? See Isaiah 58:6–8.

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### HE WHO

Justifies himself condemns God, who throughout Scripture states that he is a sinner, especially Psalm 14:3, as the apostle cites it in Romans 3:10,

Judges himself and confesses his sin justifies God and affirms His truthfulness, because he is saying about himself what God is saying about him.

(chart: *Luther's Works* [AE 10:238])

### **v. 4: "so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment"**

How does God reveal our guilt to us, according to Jeremiah 30:11c?

### **v. 5: "in sin did my mother conceive me"**

Luther: "Behold, it is so true that before Thee I am a sinner that even my nature, my very beginning, my conception, is sin, to say nothing of the words, works, thoughts, and life which follow. How could I be without sin if I was made in sin and sin is my nature and manner? I am an evil tree and by nature a child of wrath and sin. Therefore as long as this same nature and essence remains with us, we will be sinners and must say: "Forgive us our trespasses" until the body dies and is destroyed. Adam must die and decay before Christ can arise completely, and this begins with a penitent life and is completed through death. Hence death is a wholesome thing to all who believe in Christ; for it does nothing else than destroy and reduce to powder everything born of Adam, so that Christ alone may be in us," (AE 14:169).

### **v. 6: "you delight in truth in the inward being"**

Compare our Lord's words in Matthew 23:25–26. What does this teach about true repentance? See also 1 Samuel 16:7. Where does God look for true righteousness?

See also Matthew 15:7–20. What defiles a person? From where does our sin proceed?

What is the source of our righteousness? See 1 Corinthians 1:30;