

Psalm 51
“A Prayer of Repentance”

Introduction:

This psalm is classified as one of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), a subdivision of the psalms that express individual lament. The reason for this designation lies partially in the confessional nature of these psalms. The lament form of this particular psalm suitably fits the spirit of contrition and prayer for restoration that is found in it.

The superscription of this psalm informs us that historically it was written shortly after Nathan had confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba. The psalm itself is an expression of a heart overwhelmed by shame, humbled and broken by guiltiness, and yet saved from despair by penitential faith in the mercy of God. David hoped that through the process of confession, contrition, and prayer for restoration, Yahweh would deal kindly with him and with the nation of Israel.

I. Requesting Cleansing: (vs.1-2)

In verse one we read, *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.”* This psalm records David pleading with God for a cleansing from the spiritual defilement that was a result of his terrible sins. David did not assert his innocence, nor did he attempt to shift the blame of what he had done to someone else. Therefore, there was no evasion of responsibility here on the grounds of chance circumstances or an instinctive urge. He did not blame ignorance, necessity, or some evil agency. Nor was there any attempt to indicate that Bathsheba shared the blame with him. Instead, he expressed the understanding that he did not deserve God’s forgiveness, therefore he could only plead for God’s mercy, based on God’s own lovingkindness. The Hebrew word translated as *“lovingkindness”* is *“hesed”*. It is a word that refers to God’s committed covenant love. And so, David was appealing for forgiveness not based on his worthiness but based on God’s undeserved compassion for His people that motivates Him to act graciously towards them. David used an imperatival verb to express his request for mercy. This may seem odd to us, but it was not meant to convey the idea that David was demanding that God grant his request, instead, it expressed David’s confidence in the goodness of God’s essential character that gave him confidence in the expectation that he would be forgiven by God. The Hebrew verb translated as *“have mercy”* (*honnenni*) occurs frequently in psalms of lament (4:1; 6:2; 31:9; 41:4, 10; 56:1; 86:3). The same root word is used in the priestly benediction *“and be gracious to you”* found in the Book of Numbers (6:25). When a believer’s sin disrupts his or her fellowship with God, even though the sinner has no right to Divine blessings, he or she can take heart in God’s promise to forgive based solely on His loving nature (Ex.34:6–7).

The Hebrew word translated as *“blot out”* was used in that time to refer to the erasing of a debt from a book of accounts. Therefore, the idea was that just as a

financial debt could be erased from a ledger, God could forgive a moral debt so that it no longer stands against an individual when they come before God as their judge.

In verse two we read, “*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*” Here David clarified that the expression of mercy that he was pleading for was that his sins might be cleansed away. The phrase “*wash me thoroughly*” employs the language of a launderer. This language pictures sin as a deeply ingrained stain upon a person’s life, like a stain that might be found on a piece of fabric, and therefore, what was needed was an intensive cleaning process. The idea of cleansing is drawn from the liturgical ceremonial law in which one might be purified for temple participation. These requests in this psalm (see also verses 7, 9) stressed David’s desire for God to grant him complete forgiveness. The OT sacrifices and ritual washing symbolized the removal of sin and the renewal of fellowship with Yahweh. The sacrifices by themselves could not accomplish the salvation David was seeking (vs.16), but God was free to give His grace to whomever He wanted.

The three words used for sin in these first two verses (transgressions, iniquity, sin) are the three that are used the most frequently in the Biblical text to describe acts against God and human beings, and they are often found in the parallel construction of Hebrew poetic passages like this one.

In the pagan religions of the ancient Near East, it was not sins that were removed but the deity who was appeased. The individual only became aware of sin when he or she experienced circumstances that were understood to be a punishment from an offended deity. In response to such circumstances, the goal then became to pacify the anger of the offended deity (little thought was given as to whether such anger was justified or not, since pagan gods could act capriciously). When ancient pagans asked for sins to be removed, they were asking the deity to be willing to overlook their sin, put away wrath and restore the god’s favor. The rituals that accompanied this sort of approach to deity were meant to purify the individual and pacify the deity. The ritual did not remove sin; it only enabled the individual to hope that the deity would offer absolution from the sin. In regard to Israel we should not think in terms of one’s sins being eternally removed but of the sacrifices cleansing away the desecration of God’s presence caused by sin. The sacrificial rituals paved the way for forgiveness. However, only God’s choice to be gracious would actually remove a sin from the record books. It is understood that the penitent can only ask, not demand, absolution of sins (Ps.32:10). David was asking God for an expression of His mercy based on David’s trust in the compassionate nature of Yahweh and His covenantal promise to Israel.

II. Confession and Contrition: (vs.3-6)

In verse three we read, “*For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*” The Hebrew word translated here as “*acknowledge*” is a common word that simply means “*to know*”. The type of knowledge that the word refers to when it is used depends upon the context. Here the idea is that David recognized the reality that he had sinned. The initial words convey emphasis

through the use of the personal pronoun “I”. The emphasis would convey that David was taking full responsibility for his sins. He was stressing that he was now aware of just how rebellious he had been against the will of Yahweh.

In the ancient Near East individuals typically claimed that they were mystified concerning what they could possibly have done to offend a given deity. There were several factors that contributed to this ignorance. First, the gods of the ancient Near East had offered no permanent revelation of themselves that might be used as a guide. Second, polytheistic religion posed a problem in that a deed that pleased one god might potentially offend another. Third, the gods were not characterized as acting consistently from one day to the next, thus making it difficult to assess one’s standing before them. Finally, offenses often involved the neglect of rituals that the individual was not even aware he or she was supposed to be engaged in. Therefore, as we read David’s prayer to Yahweh, we are meant to understand that the relationship that Israel had to her God was much different than the relationships the pagans had to their gods.

In David’s confession, he said that his sin was constantly before him. In reading this, it must be remembered that his confession came many months after he had sinned (the young child died a week after the confession - II Sam.12:13-18). Therefore, the implication here is that this constant awareness of his sin was something that took place after Nathan’s confrontation, and that before that confrontation David had so rationalized his actions that he did not sense his guilt until Nathan confronted him about his sin.

In verse four we read, “*Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight — that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.*” When David expressed that his sin was only against God, he was not saying that he had not sinned against anyone other than God. Rather the idea he was expressing was that when a person sins against another human being, they are also ultimately sinning against God. Centuries before, Joseph expressed the same idea to Potiphar’s wife in response to her efforts to seduce him (Gen.39:9). In this psalm, David was emphasizing his knowledge that his sin was more than simply a transgression against another human being. Thus, the sense of the wording is that David’s sin was ultimately one that was done against God, and it was that transgression against God that was the most significant aspect of his sin.

And having confessed his sin, David was expressing that he would now submit to Yahweh’s judgment, acknowledging that whatever God decided to do in response to his sin would be just.

In verse five we read, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*” The verbs used in this verse are powerful in their emotional connotations. The first verb, translated as “*brought forth*” basically means to writhe or twist, referring to the pain of the birth process. The second verb translated as “*conceived*” usually referred to an animal in heat. David was not trying to demean his mother, instead he was painting his birth in the earthiest tones possible. This was not an occasion for him to say that when he was born, he was a gift from God, even though that was true. His birth was with pain, and his

conception was a very physical act. Speaking about his birth in this way was for the purpose of confirming just how human and fleshy he was by nature. By referring to the sin and iniquity that was present at the time of his birth, David was affirming that from the very beginning of his existence there had never been a time when he did not exist in a sinful state, and that state since it recently went unchecked, had led to gross sin. David did not raise this issue as an excuse, rather it was cited as a witness to the depth and extent of his sinfulness. Since he was born a sinner, at no time in his life was he without sin.

The implication here is that David was acknowledging the universal tendency toward sin within all people. Thus, this is the Old Testament's strongest affirmation of the doctrine of original sin.

As was so often the case when speaking to God in the ancient world, David drew a contrast between God's absolute moral perfection and inherent human moral weaknesses (Job 4:17; Ps.130:3; Jer.17:9). In this confession, David was not suggesting in this context that the act of conception was sinful. However, sexual activity, including intercourse, pregnancy and childbirth, all rendered the participants ritually unclean (Lev.15:16-33), even though within marriage these things were never declared to be sinful. Statements such as these define humans as unclean by nature in relation to God's absolute purity. This in turn conveys that people (specifically referring here to David) sin because they are sinners.

In verse six we read, "*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*" David's point here was that in contrast to engaging in transgression, iniquity, and sin, God delights in truth and bestowing wisdom. The Hebrew word translated as "*behold*" is used here to introduce a contrast between what David was guilty of doing, and what God had desired from him. The Hebrew word translated as "*truth*" refers to loyalty, reliability, or being faithful. The Hebrew word translated as "*wisdom*" carries the sense of being able to discern between good and evil, and between what brings success and what brings failure. It involves understanding how things really are, and thus what one should do in light of those realities. The expressions "*inward parts*" and "*hidden part*" refer to David's inner self, and this is where God hoped to find truth and to impart wisdom, but David had chosen differently. The Hebrew verb translated as "*make me to know*" refers in a very general way to changing or overturning something. In a context like this, the word means to change someone's mind about something. Therefore, it is clear that the Hebrew words translated as "*desire*" and "*make me to know*" are not intended to be synonymous, and thus the second line of the verse was used as an intensification of the first. This would indicate that to capture the actual meaning of David's words, the verse should be translated as "*behold, you desire truth in the inward parts, therefore teach me wisdom in my innermost part*". This would convey that it was only by receiving revelation from God, that one can truly have wisdom in one's heart. And so, Divine wisdom alone is able to provide the remedy for the sinful condition of a man's heart. Moral holiness does not emerge from within a sinner, but is implanted in the sinner's heart by God through the means of His Word.

III. Seeking Personal Restoration: (vs.7-12)

In verse seven we read, *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”* The actions described in this verse related to the instructions in the Mosaic Law regarding outward cleansing ceremonies. The dwarf bush called *“hyssop”*, grows wild among the rocks in Palestine. This shrub had stiff, hairy leaves and branches. Consequently, its surface held liquid well and was used for sprinkling blood in purification rituals (Lev. 14:1–9), and was also used to mark the doorframes of the Israelite at the time of the Passover (Ex 12:22). In the context of the Mosaic Law, the state of *“uncleanness”* conveyed a slightly different idea than being in a state of *“sin”*. Uncleanness often resulted from ordinary bodily processes and merely necessitated ritual purification before entering into worship (Lev. 15). So *“uncleanness”* was a ceremonial condition that pictured that a person was not in a right relationship with God. Whereas being in sin related to being engaged in objective moral evil. Therefore, the metaphor here drew on purification rituals as an illustration. This metaphor pictured that just as a cleansing ritual transferred a person, recently healed of skin disease, from an unclean to a ritually clean status (allowing them to engage in normal social interaction and participate in temple worship), so David was pleading with God to cleanse him from the uncleanness that resulted from his sin so that his relationship with God would be restored.

In the Bible, the color white is used to picture purity (Isa.1:18). By contrast, dark colors, especially black, were used to signify mourning or lamentation (two things associated with states of impurity-Ps.35:13; Zech.3:3-5). The metaphor of something being *“whiter than snow”* pictured garments that had been thoroughly cleansed of all stains. By extension this represented forgiveness, and returning to a state of acceptance with God (Rev.3:4–5; 4:4). In this prayer for moral cleansing, David employed two verbs (that were also used in vs.1–2, but in reverse order), *“wash”* (vs.7) and *“blot out”* (vs.9). In using these words, David was praying that Yahweh, like a priest, would cleanse him from his defilement. The idea in these verses is that true spiritual renewal begins with Yahweh, who alone can blot out sin, the guilt of that sin, and any reminder of that sin (32:1; 90:8; 103:3, 10–12; Mic.7:18–19).

In verses eight and nine we read, *“Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”* At this point in his confession, David moved beyond his request for forgiveness, and asked God to restore the joy of his salvation. According to the teachings of the Scriptures, joy is the result of God’s work in human souls (Isa.65:17–18). Even as God’s displeasure with one’s sin brings profound sorrow (metaphorically pictured here as broken bones), so God’s renewed pleasure in someone brings joy of heart. This joy is more than an emotional expression; it is a contented resting in God. It involves having the security of knowing that one has been fully reconciled with God so that one has peace with Him (Rom.5:1) and elsewhere this is specifically known as the joy of one’s salvation (9:14; 13:5; 35:9). Therefore, here David introduces the concept of sin as separation from God, with

emphasis upon the idea of distress at the possibility of being severed from God forever.

In verse ten we read, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*” Here David asked for a transformed life. Forgiveness and cleansing are prerequisites for having real communion with God. Therefore, David renewed his prayer for Divine wisdom and sustenance (vs.10–13). And this would involve a radical transformation. This idea is expressed by the verbs “*create*” and “*renew*”. These ideas are introduced here because communion with God and genuine moral holiness are not natural gifts but supernaturally endowed graces (Jer.24:7; 31:33; 32:39; Ezek.11:19; 18:31; 36:26; II Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15; Eph.2:10; 4:24). In the latter part of Isaiah’s prophecy, he used this same language to denote the coming universal culmination of God’s redemptive work. At that time there will be a full restoration from sin, judgment, and the vexations of life, which have resulted from human beings existing under the condemnation of God (Isa.65:17–18).

Having acknowledged his sinful condition from his birth, David now asked God (the only one with the power to grant his request) to create within him a “*clean heart*”. In the Hebrew culture (and thus throughout the Old Testament) the “*heart*” is understood to be the seat of a person’s intellect, emotions, inclinations, and will. The Hebrew verb translated as “*create*” (*bara*) always refers to a work of God whereby He produces something new or refreshed. This is the same spiritual work that the New Testament refers to as “*regeneration*” (Tit.3:5). In Ezekiel’s oracle of a restored nation, the prophet wrote this same thing when he wrote about God’s eschatological promise to give His people a new heart (36:26). Here, David was asking God to enable him to become a righteous individual by creating within him a heart that was inclined toward obedience. David also asked God to “*renew a steadfast spirit*” within him. The Hebrew term translated as “*steadfast*” refers to something that is firmly established, and thus genuinely reliable. In other words that God would enable him to successfully persevere in his pursuit of godliness.

Verse eleven balances and completes the thought of verse ten. In the previous verse David expressed the positive side of his request, the things that he wanted God to grant to him as a consequence of his forgiveness. In this verse David was asking God to withhold those things he anticipated might come upon him as judgment for his sins. David had witnessed what happened to Saul. As a consequence of Saul’s rebellion against God, Saul lost both his relationship with God, and his role as God’s servant (being king over Israel). David did not want the same thing to happen to him. This is what David was thinking about when he wrote “*Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me*”. This is important to understand, lest we misinterpret David’s words here. To have the Holy Spirit removed or to be excluded from communion with God was the ultimate punishment imaginable. On a national scale it would be the end of the covenant relationship that Israel had with God, and ultimately it would lead to the total destruction of the people (Jer.23:39; Hos.1:9). For a reigning monarch, who was Yahweh’s representative, being cut off from His presence, and to lose the indwelling of God’s Spirit would be the signal that his dynasty has been rejected

and would come to an end (I Sam.16:14; 28:6). Here David was asking God not to allow him to suffer the same fate as Saul. Therefore, the idea here is that David was concerned about maintaining both his relationship with God and continuing in his service to God. What David was speaking about here is different from what the New Testament teaches about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Through the redemptive work of Christ, God established the New Covenant as the means by which He would bless His people. One feature of the New Covenant is that every person who enters into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is immediately and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:16; Rom.8:9). Prior to the coming of Christ, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit was not given as a seal of an individual's salvation under the Old Covenant. Therefore, the removal of God's Spirit from someone, like Saul or David did not specifically relate to the loss of salvation, but rather to the loss of a special role of service before God. Though the loss of intimacy with God and his royal position would be tragic, it would not of itself indicate a loss of eternal salvation.

Interestingly, while there are numerous references to God's Spirit in the OT, only in this verse and in Isaiah 63:10-14 is the title "*Holy Spirit*" used synonymously with Yahweh's presence.

In verse twelve we read, "*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*" The fact that David asked for the restitution of the "*joy*" of his salvation rather than the restoration of salvation itself, demonstrates that David was not concerned here with losing his salvation.

David had been robbed of this joy by his sins, and now he was asking God to restore it. The wording indicates that the joy that David wrote about here had its source in the salvation that he had received from God, which David would have understood as meaning he had acceptance with God. He was asking that God might enable him to experience again the same closeness he had with God prior to his sin.

The second clause contains a problematic translation. Though the NKJV renders the clause as a reference to God's Spirit, other translations (NASU, ESV, NIV) render it as a reference to David's spirit. The reality is that there is no pronoun in the Hebrew, and thus the statement is somewhat ambiguous. However, given the sense of the request in the first clause, it is better to conclude that David was asking God to sustain a "*willing*" spirit within him. The Hebrew word David used does not really mean "*generous*", rather it was a religious word for making a freewill offering, the choice to spontaneously express devotion to God. Thus, David was asking God for an unfettered spirit (one not weighed down by sin) that he might always be willing to do what is right in God's sight.

IV. Expressions of Thanksgiving: (vs.13-17)

The requests in these verses are for things that David promised would result from the forgiveness he was seeking from God. They are expressed in the form of indirect requests. In verse thirteen we read, "*Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.*" First, David said that if God forgave him, he would teach sinners God's ways. The idea being that he would be able to

teach such things because he himself had experienced the forgiveness of God. The idea here is that God could turn the tragedy of his rebellion into something positive by using David as an object lesson in forgiveness so that more Israelites would seek reconciliation with God. All of this is expressed in the form of a vow, a promise of what David would do in response to receiving God's forgiveness. In this context, the ways of God that David promised to teach would be His grace, loyal love, and abundant mercy. The Hebrew word translated as "*converted*" means to turn, in the sense of repenting, thus he would teach others to also repent of their sins.

In verses fourteen and fifteen we read, "*Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.*" The second portion of David's vow was that if God forgave him, he would sing and praise God for that forgiveness. The praise that David vowed to render would be expressed because he had been delivered from "*bloodguilt*". Bloodguilt could signify one of two things. Either it is a reference to the judgment resulting from a grave sin requiring the death penalty (Ezek.18:13) or it is a reference to the sin that led to the death of an innocent man (II Sam.12:5, 13). Since the statement relates to receiving forgiveness, the reference is most likely to the former. The idea here is that someone who has experienced the grace of God firsthand will naturally praise God for his new lease on life. It would be a praise of God's righteousness, because the righteousness of God manifests itself not only in exercising judgment (vs.4), but also in providing forgiveness according to His promises (I Jn.1:9), when He sets aside the just penalty for sin to those who repent. The title "*Lord*" ("*Adonai*") refers to someone who has authority over another. The use of this title in parallel to the title "*God*" emphasizes David's renewed submission to Yahweh's sovereignty.

In verses sixteen and seventeen we read, "*For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — these, O God, You will not despise.*" In this portion of his confession, David acknowledged that his sin required more than what sacrifices alone could accomplish. David knew that God desired more from him than an animal sacrifice. First, David needed to secure forgiveness from God. Because only after that could he make a peace offering to God, since that sacrifice would be an acknowledgement of that forgiveness. In the Book of Leviticus, God revealed the means by which Israelites could approach Him in worship and how they could maintain their covenant relationship with Him in spite of their failings. In whole burnt offerings, the entire animal was consumed by fire on the altar (Lev.1). Sin and guilt sacrifices addressed occasional violations of ethical and ceremonial laws (Lev.4–5). Peace offerings did not remove sin; rather, they celebrated a state of well-being between God and the worshiper, who was offering thanks in response to the forgiveness they received, or because they were fulfilling a vow, or simply celebrating out of a glad heart (Lev.7:11–18). The reality is that the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus chapters 1–7 addressed only sins committed "*unintentionally*" or by omission of duty (Lev.4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:1–4, 15; Num. 15:22–29). Those sins committed in a premeditated or defiant manner were

not removed by these sacrifices (Num.15:30–36). The offending individual was left at the mercy of God. It was only on the Day of Atonement that defiant sins could be forgiven through the appeasing of the wrath of God (Lev.16:16, 21, 30, 34). On that day, God expected an attitude of humble contrition (Lev.16:29–31). The sins that David had committed were premeditated; therefore, no prescribed sacrifice addressed David's situation, and thus also, capital punishment would have been a just response on God's part to David's sin. Only God's gracious forgiveness offered to the contrite sinner and realized on the Day of Atonement was applicable for the sort of intentional sins that David had committed. Therefore, the reality was that no sacrifice was prescribed in the Mosaic Law for either adultery or murder, and therefore, none could be offered (explaining why God did not desire a sacrifice from David). Therefore, David had to trust that Yahweh Himself to provide such a sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (the full significance of this Day would not be revealed until the coming of the Messiah, Jesus). Under the Old Covenant, in anticipation of the Day of Atonement, anyone who sinned as David did, had to receive a message from a priest or prophet indicating he was forgiven. Only after receiving such a message could the penitent person again take part in worship and make a peace offering. This is what David was seeking, and what was granted to him through the prophet Nathan (II Sam.12:13). But forgiveness was not automatic. There was something God required. David referred to that requirement as "*the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart*". God required genuine repentance on the part of the person seeking forgiveness. The Hebrew word translated as "*contrite*" refers to something that is crushed, and here it conveys metaphorically the idea of humility that leads to genuine penitence. The same basic idea is conveyed in the imagery of a broken spirit.

The critical idea in this verse reflects what God taught through the prophet Jeremiah. In his preaching he directed attacks on what he considered to be a totally corrupt cultic system in Jerusalem (Jer.6:20; 7:4; 31:31-35), teaching that there was no value in an animal sacrifice offered without genuine repentance and in sincere devotion to God. David's words here also echo statements by Samuel (I Sam.15:22) and Hosea (Hos.6:6) that what the true God seeks are not superficial gifts, but rather genuine devotion of heart and the willing submission of the worshipper. Therefore, these verses (16-17) were not intended as a polemic against the sacrificial system. They were a polemic against the sacrifices of material goods without a corresponding sacrifice of spirit and heart. A proper sacrifice cannot be offered unless it is accompanied by a humble and repentant attitude.

In the final clause of verse seventeen, David wrote "*these, O God, You will not despise*". These words were an intentional understatement. This was a way of saying that God would joyfully receive a genuinely repentant sinner. The hidden meaning in the understatement was that if a sinner did try to come to God who did not possess a repentant spirit, that person would be despised and rejected.

II. The Hope of National Restoration: (vs.18-19)

In verse eighteen we read, "*Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.*" The title "*Zion*" refers to the people of Israel whose capital sat

on Mount Zion. So, here David concluded his penitential prayer by asking God to continue to shower the nation of Israel with His goodness. The reference to the building of Jerusalem's walls represented the specific expression of God's goodness that David had in mind.

A common theme in ancient Near Eastern royal records is that a successful king builds cities and temples. After capturing Jerusalem, David expanded the size of the original Canaanite city (II Sam.5:9). Further construction was done by Solomon (I Kgs.9:24), and then Hezekiah extended the walls to embrace a wider urban core (II Chron.32:5). In each case, architectural expansion is mentioned as evidence of a stable and prudent king. The figure of speech used in this verse draws on the natural association that existed at that time between a king's vitality and the undertaking of monumental architecture such as fortress walls. Therefore, the prayer for the building up of the walls of Jerusalem was be a prayer for God to grant success to David's plans to enhance the city's defenses. This sort of blessing would demonstrate that God's favor was still upon Israel.

In verse nineteen we read, "*Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.*" David's anticipation of the righteous sacrifices that would be offered by the Israelites would be those that reflected the heart attitude described in verses sixteen and seventeen. Just as David's sin had threatened the welfare of the entire nation of Israel, in like manner, God's forgiveness of David would result in blessing upon the entire nation.

Conclusion:

In the end, David was ultimately a justified believer who was saved by the grace of God through his faith in Yahweh's willingness to forgive His sins (sins that were ultimately atoned for by the substitutionary death of Christ). As a temporal result of his sin, David lost fellowship with God and came under Divine chastening and discipline. For David, as well as for all other believers, the way back to cleansing and restored fellowship was through the free and full confession of his sins, in total reliance through faith on the grace and mercy of God.

The historical occasion of this psalm does not confine the significance of David's words here to that historical situation alone. It can be appropriately applied to anyone under conviction of serious sin who wants to understand the proper language of repentance.

David's confession (as it is recorded here) is dominated by four themes:

- A sense of personal accountability
- A conviction of having turned against God
- A plea for complete cleansing from sin
- A casting of himself upon God who alone could save him