

## David and Bathsheba

This lesson is on Psalm 51. Some of the psalms in the Bible don't provide us with any information about who wrote it or when it was written. This particular psalm is a striking exception. If you find this psalm in your Bible and look at the text above verse 1, you'll see this:

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.

This tells us a great deal! Not only do we know that this psalm was written by David, but we also know the context. The psalm was written after the prophet Nathan confronted David about the sin he committed with Bathsheba.

Since this psalm is about repentance we need to understand what happened before we can dive into it. Everything started when the king of Ammon died and his son Hanun gained the throne. Since David had been friends with Hanun's father, David tried to comfort Hanun for the loss he had just suffered:

**2 Samuel 10:1-2:** "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon."

David was genuinely trying to comfort the son of a man who he respected. However, Hanun decided that the best way to respond to David's gesture was to be as insulting and rude as

possible:

**2 Samuel 10:4:** “Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away.”

Hanun went out of his way to humiliate David's servants and send them home naked. He then decided that since he had already insulted David, he might as well hire an army of mercenaries and send them to kill David:

**2 Samuel 10:6:** “And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Bethrehab and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ishtob twelve thousand men.”

Things had rapidly gone from bad to worse. David tried to comfort Hanun over the loss of his father, and in return Hanun declared war on him. This war didn't go in Hanun's favor. Many of the mercenaries who he hired were killed, and survivors refused to work for Hanun again:

**2 Samuel 10:18-19:** “And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.”

At this point David had defeated Hanun's hired mercenaries but hadn't dealt with Hanun himself yet. The battle had been won but the war wasn't finished. After the year was over, the armies of Israel went out to attack Hanun and defeat the Ammonites once and for all. That is when David made a critical mistake. Instead of joining his army he stayed home:

**2 Samuel 11:1:** “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.”

This was the time of year when kings went out to battle. David had unfinished business with Hanun – but instead of dealing with it himself he sent someone else and stayed home. David should have gone out with his armies but he didn't. He should have been the one to confront Hanun, but instead of doing his job he sent someone else to fight his battle.

If David had been out in the field with his soldiers then he would never have seen Bathsheba and none of what followed would have happened. The reason David was tempted is because he wasn't where he should have been.

Since David was at Jerusalem he saw something he shouldn't have seen:

**2 Samuel 11:2:** “And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.”

Should David have been watching this woman bathe

herself? Absolutely not! David should have gone back inside. The only reason he could see her at all is because he lived in a palace, and his palace was taller than the surrounding buildings.

At this point David could have walked away but he didn't. Instead he made things worse. Even though he already had multiple wives, he decided that he wanted Bathsheba as well:

**2 Samuel 11:3:** “And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

David was told that this woman was *married*. In fact, he was married to Uriah the Hittite – one of David's famous mighty men! That meant she was the wife of one of David's most committed and loyal soldiers. She was also the granddaughter of Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor. In other words, *she wasn't available*.

At this point David could still have walked away from this – but he didn't. He decided that he didn't care that she was a married woman. He didn't care that she was the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers. He didn't care that her husband was risking his life on the battlefield to fight David's war. The king wanted to have sex with her, and so he took her:

**2 Samuel 11:4:** “And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.”

Keep in mind that David had a *lot* of wives. Yet in spite of that he still choose to take someone else's wife. David thought that no one would find out what he had done, but he soon learned that she was pregnant:

**2 Samuel 11:5:** “And the woman conceived, and

sent and told David, and said, I am with child.”

David knew he had a problem because Uriah would never believe the child was his. After all, Uriah was on the battlefield fighting in Joab's army. Instead of confessing what he had done David decided to hide his sin by making Uriah think the child was his. He called Uriah home from the battlefield and tried to get him to go home to his wife, but Uriah was too honorable to do that. Since David couldn't trick Uriah he decided to have him murdered instead:

**2 Samuel 11:15:** “And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.”

It took a lot of sins to get to this point. All of this started when David didn't go out and fight his own battles, and decided to stay home while his soldiers were dying on the battlefield. He then decided to spy on a woman who was taking a bath, and then have sex with her even though she was married. He then tried to deceive one of his most loyal soldiers, and when that failed he decided fix everything by murdering him. In all of these terrible sins David was successful. He killed Uriah and added Bathsheba to his large collection of wives:

**2 Samuel 11:27:** “And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”

David deceived a lot of people but he was unable to deceive the Lord. God saw what David had done and He wasn't pleased, so He sent Nathan the prophet to confront him. The Lord wasn't going to allow David to get away with this. God wasn't

going to allow David's sin to remain hidden. What David had done was exceptionally evil, and God was going to confront him and punish him.

Usually when God's prophets confronted kings with their sin the kings rejected it. The only king who ever repented of his sin and turned from it after being confronted by a prophet was actually David! In other cases the prophet was rejected, or put in prison, or killed. But this time the king listened.

The first thing Nathan did was use a story to make David understand the great evil he had done. He then told the king what God had to say:

**2 Samuel 12:7-9:** “And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.”

God had blessed David *tremendously!* David was king over the entire nation. He started out life as a lowly shepherd who was despised by everyone – even his own family. Now David was an honored king with a long line of victories on the battlefield. He lived in a palace and had riches and honor and glory. He even had a wife – in fact, he had *multiple* wives. David had everything he desired. If he had wanted more then God said He would have actually given him more!

Yet instead of being grateful for the immense riches he

possessed, David decided to steal from someone who was much poorer than him! Uriah wasn't nearly as rich as David. Uriah wasn't a king. He didn't live in a palace, but he did have a wife that he loved dearly. David should have let Uriah keep his wife but instead he callously murdered him and took his wife for himself. This was a vile and wicked thing to do.

God wasn't going to let David go unpunished:

**2 Samuel 12:10-12:** “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

Since David brought trouble into the house of Uriah, God decided to bring trouble into the house of David. The Lord did exactly what He said He would do. He raised up Absalom, David's son, who launched a rebellion against him. Absalom raped David's concubines in broad daylight in the sight of all of Israel (2 Samuel 16:22). Since David took Uriah's wife, God took David's wives. God did to him what he had done to Uriah.

That brings us back to Psalm 51. Unlike all the other kings, David sincerely repented when God confronted him with his sin. This didn't spare David from the consequences of his actions but he did find forgiveness. Look at what David wrote:

**Psalm 51:1-3:** “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine

iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.”

David confessed his sin. He didn't hide it or pretend that it was just a mistake. He was open and honest with God. He repented of his sin and humbly asked for mercy. He didn't demand forgiveness or say that he had a right to do what he did; instead he asked for forgiveness. He appealed to the love and mercy of God.

David also wanted to be cleansed from his sin. He didn't want to obtain forgiveness and then sin again. He viewed his sin with horror and wanted to be cleansed of it. He didn't want to be a slave to sin! Instead he wanted to be freed from it. David wanted to be a new person.

It's critical to understand that in order to obtain forgiveness *we must repent!* There can be no salvation apart from repentance. Jesus was very clear about this:

**Matthew 4:17:** “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

**Matthew 9:13:** “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

**Matthew 11:20:** “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:”

Jesus came to command people everywhere to *repent*. David is a great example of this. When he was confronted with his sin he acknowledged it, he asked God to forgive him, and he asked God to cleanse him from his sin. David no longer wanted



his sin to have any part in his life. In the future he wanted to be a servant of righteousness, not a servant of sin. David abhorred what he had done and he didn't want to do it again. That's what genuine repentance looks like.

Some people want to be forgiven but they don't want to repent. Instead they want God to give them a free pass. They believe they can go to God without ever admitting they've done anything wrong. These people have no intention of ever turning from any of their wicked deeds. They love their sin and have no intention of changing – and for that reason God isn't going to forgive them.

Do you think God would have forgiven David if he told Nathan he wasn't sorry for his sin and had no intention of changing his behavior? In order to be saved you must repent of your sins! You must declare war on your sin. Those who cling to their sin won't find forgiveness:

**1 John 2:3-5:** “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”

Those who are genuinely saved will try to keep God's commandments. This doesn't mean they'll never sin or that they'll always keep them perfectly, but it *does* mean they abhor sin and are earnestly seeking holiness. It means they genuinely desire to do what's right in the sight of God. As 1 John says, those who refuse to repent, and who aren't sorry for what they've done, and who continue to pursue sin *are not saved*. The Bible is very clear about this! The reason David obtained forgiveness is because he repented.

After David confessed his sin he said something that may seem a little strange:

**Psalm 51:4:** “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”

David said that the only one he sinned against was God. But didn't David take Bathsheba and murder Uriah? Why did David think that the only person he had sinned against was God when all of those other people were involved?

To answer that question we have to understand what sin actually is. Why was it wrong for David to murder Uriah? Because it was a violation of God's commandment. Why was it wrong for David to take Bathsheba? Because it was a violation of God's commandment. Sin is a violation of the commandments of *God*. The laws David had broken weren't Uriah's laws or Bathsheba's laws. They were God's laws!

David didn't call his sin a “mistake” or an “error”, as so many people do today. No, David says that what he did was *evil*. We need to call sin what it really is and not make light of it.

Not only did David confess his sin, but he went further and confessed that he was a sinner:

**Psalm 51:5:** “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

David wasn't saying that he was the product of adultery, or that his mother was sinning when she got pregnant. Instead he was saying that he inherited the sin of Adam. He was already a sinner before he was even born – from the moment of conception. You see, the truth is that there was never a moment in our lives when we were sinless and perfect. We didn't become a sinner from the moment we first sinned; instead we were already guilty from our very first moment of life. The New Testament explains that we all inherit the guilt of Adam:

**Romans 5:18-19:** “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

The reason it's possible for us to be saved by the actions of one man (Jesus) is because we were all made guilty by the actions of one man (Adam). The offense of *one person* caused all of us to be condemned. We were *already* condemned the moment we were conceived – and that makes it possible for Christ to save us! Since one man's actions condemned us, one man's actions can make us righteous. Our salvation depends upon us inheriting the guilt and condemnation of Adam.

David's confession isn't done. He brings up another critical point:

**Psalms 51:6:** “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.”

It can be easy to live a lie and make everyone around you think that you're a good person when you're not. It's not that difficult to show up to church on Sunday morning and act like you're a righteous child of God, when in fact your heart is very far from the Lord. Judas managed to trick everyone into thinking that he was one of Christ's most loyal disciples – but Jesus knew right from the start that he was evil. You may be able to fool the people around you but you can't fool God.

God isn't interested in an outward display of religion. He's not looking for people who can fake it for an hour or two on Sunday morning. What He desires is a heart that's perfect toward Him. He wants the *real thing!* He seeks sincerity. Putting on a

convincing outward show while staying the same wicked person you've always been isn't going to save you! It's impossible to deceive God.

How do you find righteousness? Well, you can't obtain it by your own works. It's impossible to earn it or create it yourself. Righteousness only comes from the Lord:

**Psalm 51:7:** "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

If God forgives us then we'll be forgiven indeed! If the Lord cleanses us from our sins then that settles the matter for all of eternity. However, if we try to obtain righteousness somewhere else, such as through our own good deeds, then we'll be found guilty when we stand before God. There's only one way to be made clean and David knew exactly what it was.

David also felt *guilt* over his sin:

**Psalm 51:8:** "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."

Another word for this is *conviction*. People who aren't sorry about their sins and feel no remorse over them aren't going to find forgiveness. Why would God forgive you if you're not sorry? Do you really think God will forgive you if you don't believe that God has a right to tell you what to do? David was *crushed* by his sin. All of the joy was gone out of his life. That's why he asked the Lord to forgive him and restore the joy that he once had.

David didn't put any blame on anyone else. He owned his sin and took full responsibility for it. When David sought forgiveness he didn't go to a priest or to anyone else. Instead he went directly to God. Only God can forgive sins!

We can see that David wanted his sins to be forgiven. But

he also wanted something else:

**Psalm 51:9-10:** “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

David wanted God to change his heart so that he wouldn't return to wickedness. He didn't want to repeat what he had done! Notice that David didn't promise to try harder next time. Instead he *asked God to change him*. He prayed that God would give him a new heart so he no longer had the desire to sin. David wanted to be a different person.

God granted David's request – and God will also grant that same request of all those who seek it with all their heart. For the rest of David's life he never again committed adultery or murdered anyone. He was a changed man. His repentance was sincere and he truly did turn from his sin with all his heart.

During David's confession and repentance he asked God to not take the Holy Spirit from him:

**Psalm 51:11:** “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”

During the church age it's impossible for us to lose the Holy Spirit because He is sealed within us (2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30). We can grieve the Holy Spirit (which is a serious matter) but God will never take Him from us. However, in the Old Testament that wasn't the case. Very few people in the Old Testament were ever given the Spirit, and if they sinned they were in grave danger of losing Him.

A great example of this is Samson. When he violated his Nazarite vow, God removed His Spirit from him and Samson lost his great strength:

**Judged 16:20:** “And she said, The Philistines be

upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.”

David knew that he was one of the few people of his day who had the Spirit, and he was worried that God would remove the Spirit from him because of the terrible sin he committed. That's why he asked God to let him keep Him. Since there's no indication that God did remove his Spirit, it seems that God granted this request.

We've seen that David confessed his sin, repented of it, and asked God for mercy. But he didn't stop there. He also promised to teach other people the ways of God so that they would also turn from their sin:

**Psalm 51:13:** “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

David didn't just want to address the sin in his own life. He also wanted to help the people who are around him. Once David cast the beam out of his own eye he was in a position to teach others. This is a natural effect of repentance! When you come to hate the sin in your own life you'll start wanting to help others overcome sin as well. Sin is a horrible thing and has deadly consequences. It's only natural to want to see your friends and loved ones saved from it before it's too late. How can anyone hate sin and yet be unconcerned about the affect it has in the lives of others?

David confronted his sin very aggressively. Do you know what he did once God forgave him? He sang God's praises:

**Psalm 51:14:** “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

David was *grateful* – so grateful that he wanted to sing about what God had done for him! He praised the Lord for the tremendous mercy and grace that God had shown him.

We need to understand that it's very expensive for God to forgive our sins. Since God is just, He can't sweep our sins under a rug and pretend they never happened. Sin *has* to be punished. That means the only way we can be forgiven is if God punishes an innocent person in our place. The only innocent person is Christ – and that's why Jesus died in our place and took upon Himself the wrath that we deserved. The fact that God is willing to forgive us at all (and pay such a high personal price to do so) speaks volumes about the tremendous love and mercy of God. We should *definitely* be singing God's praises and thanking Him for His tremendous gift of forgiveness and salvation! We have much to be thankful for.

David understood what forgiveness was all about. He knew that God was looking for a repentant heart:

**Psalm 51:16-17:** "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

David knew he couldn't just sacrifice an animal and walk away. We can't purchase forgiveness by doing good deeds, or giving money to the church, or helping the poor. God requires *repentance* – a heart that's broken over sin and seeks to turn from it and do what's right in His sight. That person will obtain forgiveness and everlasting life. Those who refuse to repent and try to bribe God through gifts won't find the righteousness they seek.

David ended this psalm with an interesting request:

**Psalm 51:18-19:** “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.”

At first glance this seems strange and out of place. Why would this be included in a psalm about repentance and forgiveness?

Well, let's take a step back and think about it. Today Jerusalem is surrounded by a wall that's more than two miles long. That wall didn't always exist! In David's time the city of Jerusalem wasn't surrounded by a wall. The reason this mattered is because in the ancient world it made Jerusalem a much easier target for an enemy invasion. Remember, this entire episode started when Hunan decided to attack David. A military threat against Israel began the chain of events that led to the writing of this psalm.

Do you know who built the wall around Jerusalem? It was Solomon – the son of David and Bathsheba:

**1 Kings 3:1:** “And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.”

In David's prayer of repentance he asked God to build the wall around Jerusalem – and God answered that prayer through Solomon, the son of Bathsheba. Solomon built the wall. He also built the first temple as well. God did indeed build up Jerusalem and created a place in the city for the offering of sacrifices – and He did it through Solomon.



This psalm provides a clear picture of what genuine repentance looks like. God is able to forgive of all our sins, if we go to Him and confess our sins and repent. However, if we choose to continue in our sins and reject the very thought of turning away from them then we won't find forgiveness. Genuine repentance is a matter of the heart. The Lord won't despise a heart that's broken and contrite. God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).