

# Mark This

## *What Does God Require of You?*

Psalm 50:1 *A Psalm of Asaph.*

The Mighty One, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

<sup>2</sup> Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

<sup>3</sup> Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest.

<sup>4</sup> He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

<sup>5</sup> "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

<sup>6</sup> The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!  
Selah

<sup>7</sup> "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.

<sup>8</sup> Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

<sup>9</sup> I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds.

<sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

<sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.

<sup>12</sup> "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.

<sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

<sup>14</sup> Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High,

<sup>15</sup> and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

<sup>16</sup> But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips?

<sup>17</sup> For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you.

<sup>18</sup> If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers.

<sup>19</sup> "You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit.

<sup>20</sup> You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

<sup>21</sup> These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

<sup>22</sup> "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

<sup>23</sup> The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

## Psalm 50

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# What does God Require of You?

**WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF YOU, O MAN?** Such a question strikes at the heart of all that we are as people on God's earth. God has made each one of us. We are his offspring (**Acts 17:28**); every person on planet earth. God

has made each of us to be in covenant with himself. For some, it is a covenant of works that says, “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil” (9), whether they are “self-seeking” or “do not obey the truth” (8), it does not matter. For others, it is a covenant of grace, whereby God’s kindness and mercy are made known to them in Christ, and they receive it by faith through grace alone. But whatever the case, it means we all have a relationship with him. Therefore, it says, “They knew God” (Rom 1:21). And if we are in a relationship and knew God, then everyone must answer our question.

Therefore, the question is put to you again. What does God require of you? The question comes from the OT. The prophet Micah asked it (Mic 6:8) and reminded us that Moses did too. “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you?” (Dt 10:12-13). The answers in those passages are short. But Psalm 50 is basically dealing with the same question. It just takes a lot longer to unfold.

## Psalm 50

### THE INTRODUCTION: ON ZION AND SACRIFICE

After the superscription (“*A Psalm of Asaph*”), we have a lengthy introduction (vv. 1-6). It tells us about the Speaker and the audience. The Speaker is “The Mighty One, God the LORD” (Psalm 50:1). Literally it is El, Elohim, Yahweh. Three distinct words for God. This triad of names hints at the Trinitarian nature of the Speaker as it is disclosed to us.

First, He “speaks” (1). The great historian Eusebius said, “Here the divine prediction clearly prophesies that God will come manifestly, meaning none other but the Word of God” (Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* 6.3.261). Second, God is “perfect is beauty ... shin[ing] forth” (2). Two attributes: perfect and beautiful describe his fiery appearance. He is not ugly. He is not tainted. He is not blemished. Shining beautifully, but like “a devouring fire” (3). Our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29; Dt 4:24). It is not safe to be around this. Third, around him is a mighty tempest (3). Fire and storm, the usual phenomenon that accompany God’s coming in the OT—images of the Holy Spirit. A triad of ideas around a triad of names.<sup>1</sup> God is coming!

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<sup>1</sup> The poem is also built on a 3+3 or 3+3+3 structure, with 19 of the 23 lines having that meter. See L. C. Allen, “Structure and Meaning in Psalm 50,” *Vox Evangelica* 14 (1984): 17 [17-37]. [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol14/psalm-50\\_allen.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol14/psalm-50_allen.pdf)

Who is he coming to? He speaks and, “summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting” (Ps 50:1). The Psalm is directed to the nations, all the peoples of the world. He comes with a message.

What is this message, what is the purpose of his visit? “He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge *his people*” (4). Suddenly, the audience is pared down to his chosen people. The heavens and earth are merely bearing witness. Why is he coming to them? In the next verse it says, “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” (5). This is not referring to that covenant of works, but to the special covenant God made with Israel in the wilderness when God shone forth from Paran to give the Law on Sinai (Dt 33:2). God is coming to his Israel because they have a special relationship to him. And now, those people who live on Zion (2)<sup>2</sup> are being called to gather before the righteous God who is himself the judge (6).

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<sup>2</sup> **Going Deeper**—The relationship of Ps 50 to the songs of the sons of Korah. Long ago, Theodoret of Cyr wrote, “The present psalm, attributed to Asaph, is in keeping with the previous psalm: it also forecasts the judgment to come and the manifestation of our God and Savior” (*Commentary on the Psalms* 50.1). Besides judgment, “Zion” is another one of those connectors, taking us back to Psalm 48 where Mt. Zion has become God’s great mountain and now its people are glad.

*Selah*, pause, because this means the message is for God's church today. What does the LORD require of *her*?

#### PSALM 50:7-15: ON SACRIFICE AND DELIVERANCE

One of the things that God requires of people is **religion**. It has become almost second nature to the current generation of Christians to mock religion as some kind of evil thing. "Spirituality" is where it's at, not dead-religion, as they sound more like new-agers than historical Christians. Of course, all "religion" must be "dead," right?

Well, God instituted very religious things for Israel, especially the sacrificial system. These were good things, not bad. "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you" (7). What have they done wrong? "I am God, your God" (7). It must have to do with this relationship they have with him.

"Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me" (8). In Psalm 51 David will sing, "You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering" (Ps 51:16). People have used this to prove that God actually doesn't care about sacrifices at all. Again, that's dead religion. But in

Psalm 50, it explicitly says that God is not rebuking them for their sacrifices. Keeping burnt offerings before the Lord on a continual basis is what they were supposed to be doing. No, it isn't the externals that are the problem. But they don't seem to have understood the point of them.

So God adds, “I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds” (9). Read by itself, it sounds almost like David, and could be taken out of context to say the opposite of what we just read. But it isn't contradicting vs. 8. The bulls and goats weren't the problem. Rather, “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine” (10-11).

First off, this teaches some amazing things about God. His knowledge is comprehensive. He knows literally everything, even all the birds of the hills. When Jesus said not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of the Father, he is showing among other things that he clearly knows his Psalms. It is impossible to overstate the point, that God knows everything. He is omniscient. There is nothing that is hidden from his sight, and that is a point that will be brought out soon enough.

Second, **God owns everything**. As Creator, everything is his. This is one of the reasons why our original question can be asked for everyone. How much is everything? Look at the first row of mountains on your way home today. That's one row. At sunset, you can see maybe eight to ten amazing rows of mountains here on the Front Range. They are spectacular. But that's less than 1% of 1,000. I dare say that you don't get 1,000 rows of mountains before you hit the Pacific Ocean in California.<sup>3</sup> A thousand is a number small enough to imagine, and yet large enough to prove a point. Now add all the cattle that are on all of these hills. That number is uncountable. But they are all God's. Now imagine a forest. We arbitrarily designate land as forest land, where one forest runs into another. Thus, we end up with lots of forests here in Colorado. But really, there is only one. And how big is that forest? How long could you walk in it before getting totally lost? How far would you get through it before you died? How many beasts are there in those forests: wolves, wolverines, mice, picas, chipmunks, bears, cougars, mountain-lions, elk, deer, lynx, raccoon, beaver,

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<sup>3</sup> It is not inappropriate to give the image of the Rocky Mountains rather than some kind of small, rolling hills like you might find in Iowa. **Dahood** (p. 307-08) translates the phrase as “**the towering mountains**.” Not the rolling hills of Jerusalem, but the huge peaks of the Bashan.

squirrel, fox, rabbit, porcupine, and how many more? And how many of each are there? Everyone is his. He knows them all. Why tell this to Israel? Because **he doesn't need their bulls and goats**. Just like he doesn't need your worship, church. You do not "complete" him.

God is not finished. **"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine"** (12). God isn't saying he gets hungry. He is saying that he wouldn't go running to your door to beg you for food if he were. Because anything that moves is his to eat if he wants to. The entire fruit of the earth is his, all its food, animals, plants, fish, berries, everything. Do you think even the government could take away God's food if they got angry enough?

**"Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?"** (13). But just in case you thought maybe he did eat, to proves he doesn't. This may be said to counter a popular view that the reason you sacrifice to the gods is precisely this reason.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "There seems to be an allusion to the carnivorous goddess **Anath**. In a fragmentary text ... Anath is described as devouring the flesh of her brother Baal and drinking his blood ... **"She devours his flesh without a knife, she drinks his blood without a cup."** The similarity with the present verse becomes even more striking with the observation that Baal is sometimes ... said to assume the form of a bull ... one of the words found in the present verse." **Mitchell Dahood S.J.**, *Psalms I: 1-50: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 16, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 308.

And we all know, the Israelites were prone to thinking about worship like pagans. But God is not like them. He does not need their sacrifices; the people do.

So he now adds, “Offer to God a sacrifice...” (14). He *does* want their sacrifices after all. But this is “a sacrifice of thanksgiving.” You mean, the sacrifice you want must come from the heart? Yes. True religion is not *merely* outward. It must also be inward. *You* have to want to worship God with a thank offering. This is what the outward act was always pointing them to, not an end to itself, but a renewed heart.

The verse’s pairing says, “And perform your vows to the Most High” (14). This is still related to the outward worship of Israel. Though extending beyond corporate worship, this goes back to places like **Leviticus 22:21**, “When anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow...” or **Lev 7:16**, “If the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering...” So it isn’t just making a vow, it is making a vow as an act of worship to God. Therefore, if you make a vow, fulfill it. This hints at something God will bring up very soon.

There is one more thing he tells them first, “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you

shall glorify me” (15). Worshiping God is done because he is the Living God. If you call, he will answer in your day of trouble. In the previous Psalm, the day of trouble was when evil people cheat you and steal from you. He will deliver you if you call upon him, and then you will worship him by giving praise to his name.

#### PSALM 50:16-21: THE REBUKE

Suddenly, the audience shifts. The Divine Word begins to go after “the wicked.” “But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to recite my statutes of take my covenant on your lips?’” (16). He could be talking to the entire earth here, but it is better to see this as the wicked among the covenant people of Israel. What makes them wicked? Their hearts *and* their works.

“You hate discipline” (17). Hebrews admits, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant” (Heb 12:11). But he doesn’t say we hate it, because we know that it “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” But the wicked person hates the discipline of God. All he sees in it is punishment. It is punitive to him. “God must hate me if he

is doing this to me,” thinks the wicked person to himself, for he knows not the love of God.

“You cast my words behind you” (Ps 50:17). What words are those? The words of Torah: instruction and law. “If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son” (20). **Six sins**. Four are about the mouth. Two of those are directed at the way we speak about our own brothers. What kind of people speak like this to their siblings, the children of their own mother? Wicked people. All of these are related to the Second Table of the Law: bearing false witness, stealing, and adultery. God cares about how we behave towards our fellow man, not just what we believe. If you think all God is concerned about is right doctrine, you don’t know God.

Mouths are contrasted next. Their mouth is wicked. But now God will speak. “**These things you have done, and I have been silent**” (21). God has let these things go too many times to count. Now is the day of reckoning.

How do people start to think when God does not discipline them for their sins? “You thought that I was one like yourself” (21). In other words, you give each other passes on such things if it suits your own self-interest. Because I didn’t go after you immediately, you thought I was like you, and didn’t care about righteousness. “But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you” (21).

#### PSALM 50:22-23: CALL TO REPENTANCE/DIVINE WRATH

Therefore, the song concludes, “Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to the one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!” (22-23). The promise is laid out: **Salvation**. Glorious salvation. Eternal life with God. But it only comes through repentance and remembering God. When you come to worship the LORD, you must do so rightly and offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving. This is what glorifies the LORD. But if you do not, he will tear you apart, and no one will be able to deliver you.

This is both a frightening and yet soothing way to end a song that speaks a message that the entire world is to witness

as God speaks to his people about the seriousness of the covenant he has offered to them. It is the long form of the prophets who said, “Who has told you, O man, what is good and what the LORD requires of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8); “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?” (Deut 10:12-13).

“Pastor,” you tell me, “Thank you for this word. This is what I long to hear. We need to tell wicked people that they need to repent. Churches aren’t preaching this anymore. Thank you for telling us that worship is about the heart too. Sometimes it is hard for me to go about the externals in our worship service, because they do tend to get dry and feel dead to me. But it is about the heart. Thank you for preaching this Psalm to us.”

And now, friends, you can go on your merry way today, knowing that you have heard the word of the LORD. Truth has gone out. You can sleep well. God is vindicated.

And yet, I wonder.

Have you heard it all so many times, that it no longer has a personal impact? Do you hear Psalm 50 and those “wicked people” and think, glad he’s not talking about me! Has the truth of the word gotten lost in the complacency of having known these things for so long that it no longer strikes a chord in your own heart? Beloved, it may very well be true. For it was true of David.

## **Transition: The Priest, the Prophet, and the King**

David? What does David have to do with anything? Isn’t this a Psalm of *Asaph*? Indeed it is. David did not write this Psalm. But he commissioned Asaph to write it, and in doing so had no idea what he was getting himself into. Here, I want you to remember **the three offices** of the OT: prophet, priest, and king. These offices were how God spoke to the people, mediated sin, and governed. Everything about Israel was wrapped up in these offices.

Who was Asaph? He was the “chief” **priest** of the Levites that David appointed to be “**ministers before the ark of the Lord**” and singers of psalms who invoked, thanked, and

praised the God of Israel (1Chr 16:4-7). David knew him personally. He appointed him. When Asaph is introduced to us in Chronicles, it says that on that very day when David first appointed him, he composed and sang a song of praise (8-36). This made David very happy.

Now, I need to tell you that there is one collection of the psalms of Asaph in the Psalter. They begin *Book Three* (Ps 73-83). We are still in *Book Two*. There is only one other Psalm of Asaph in all of the Book of Psalms. It is here, between the songs of Korah and a new collection of the songs of David which begin with the famous penitential Psalm 51. Why?

Now we need to remember who David is said to be by the ancient records. First of all, he was the King. So now we have the priest and the king that we are discussing. The Bible calls him a man after God's own heart (1Sa 13:14; Acts 13:22) from the time he was a young boy. Other sources tell us that he "sang praise with all his heart, and he loved his Maker" (Sirach 47:8). He is the one who danced before the LORD with all his might (2Sa 6:14). He "gave beauty to the feasts, and arranged their times throughout the year" (Sir 47:10). In other words, this is a man of God if ever there was one. This is David: Believer *par excellence*. He would make a

fine addition to any church. While no one here would probably put themselves in the same category of holiness as David, being outwardly good *and* loving God with our hearts are what we are supposed to be marked by as Christians. And to be honest, that's what the world thinks we all are (until they are able to pounce on our hypocrisy, of course). I wonder what you think?

Just here, I want us to consider the superscription of Psalm 51 just for fun. It comes immediately after this psalm of Asaph, so why not? “*To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba*” (Ps 51:1). Nathan *the prophet*? Now we have the prophet, the priest, and the king all right together. Do you remember the story?

“*In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah*” (2Sa 11:1). It is a time of war. This is the time when kings go off to do their job, to lead their people into victory. *King Arthur* kind of stuff. That's what David has done for years and years now. He is great and mighty, a man of renown, having slain Goliath and now, because of it, also his

“tens of thousands” (1Sa 18:6-7). The author of Samuel wants you to know and remember all this.

“But David remained at Jerusalem.” In the holy City, Zion itself, where the throne of God himself resides. Uh oh.

“It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful” (2). Most of us have heard this story so many times, we know what’s going on. But I recently came across a discussion of this in a doctrinal dissertation on, of all things, the genealogy of Matthew and the story of the Watchers (sons of God) in Genesis 6 (and 1 Enoch).<sup>5</sup> It puts the sin in an even more devastating light that you can imagine.

The short of the argument is that all four women in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus all have two things in common. Matthew could have chosen any number of women to put in his lineage: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel. But he chose four women who have warfare and sexual

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<sup>5</sup> Amy Elizabeth Richter, “The Enochic Watcher’s Template and the Gospel of Matthew,” PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 2010. [http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=dissertations\\_mu](http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=dissertations_mu). Michael Heiser discusses this in his new book Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ (Crane: MO, Defender Publishing, 2017), 83-86.

transgressions as their main story lines, and they are necessarily related to each other.<sup>6</sup> One of them is **Bathsheba** (**Matt 1:6**). This isn't coincidental, and it coincides with exactly the problem that Jews long ago said came about because of the Gen 6 story. These are the very things that the Jews said the Watchers taught me that brought about the Flood.<sup>7</sup>

David goes up to a **roof**, the highest place available. It is so important, it mentions it twice. He is surveying the greatness of his kingdom. But apparently, he is also doing something else. He looks down and sees **a very beautiful woman**. Her beauty is emphasized. Then he sends “**messengers**” (*malek/aggelos/angels*) and “**took her**” (**4**) and lay with her. All of these are found in the Genesis 6:1-4

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<sup>6</sup> It is possible that they are also all Gentiles, which would add one more interesting feature, since the Genesis 6 story predates the existence of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> “Asael taught men to make swords of iron and weapons and shields and breastplates and every instrument of war. He showed them metals of the earth and how they should work gold to fashion it suitably, and concerning silver, to fashion it for bracelets and ornaments for women. And he showed them concerning antimony and eye paint and all manner of precious stones and dyes. And the sons of men made for themselves and for their daughters, and they transgressed and led the holy ones astray” (1En 8:1). Richter summarizes, “According to the Enochic watchers’ template, evil came into the world when the watchers transgressed their heavenly boundary to engage in illicit sexual contact with women and teach them illicit arts. The consequences of the watchers’ transgression are violence, unrighteousness, evil, idolatry, and disease. Some of these consequences come from human use of the skills taught by the watchers, skills for seduction, war-making, sorcery, and astrology.” Richter, abstract, (p. 3 of the PDF).

story,<sup>8</sup> sometimes word-for-word, as the sons of God from the height of heaven itself look down upon the daughters of men and see that they are very beautiful, took them, and had giant offspring (Nephilim) who were the “mighty men” (*gibborim*) of old.

The woman happens to be the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of a handful of David’s own “mighty men” (*gibborim*; **2Sa 23:8, 39**) who among other things killed the remaining Rephaim giants in Canaan (**1Ch 20**), and who if he was not off fighting war for David would have been home at that very moment. Like the sons of God, David knows full well that what he is doing is wrong. Like the sons of God who know full well that they will be guilty of committing “a great sin” (cf. **1En 6:3**), David commits adultery, known throughout the ancient world as “the great sin” (**Gen 20:9**).<sup>9</sup> And he knows it.

*But he doesn’t care.*

There is much more to it. But the point is, it would be difficult to tell a story in a more offensive way to an ancient

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<sup>8</sup> And repeated in **1En 6:1ff**.

<sup>9</sup> See **J. J. Rabinowitz**, “The ‘Great Sin’ in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 73; **W. L. Moran**, “The Scandal of the ‘Great Sin’ at Ugarit,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 280–81. Also *RS* 17.228:6; *RS* 17.372A+360A:7, 12.

Jew who saw these very things as the very origin of the evil that brought about the Flood. What David has done is an absolute abomination in the eyes of God.

*And he doesn't care.* David, the worshiping Christian extraordinaire, *doesn't care.*

In fact, when he finds out that she is going to have a baby (just like sons of God had), he plots how he might not be held accountable by anyone for it, first by trying to get his friend to come home from the war and be with his wife, and when that doesn't work, by murdering him. **The earth was filled with violence (Gen 6:11).**

Imagine then, a man who has just appointed this great temple priest to compose these great songs for Israel. I can see this very David listening to Psalm 50 during that year after his transgressions and being moved to tears over its beauty. **“Great words, Asaph! Thank you for this word. This is what I long to hear. We need to tell wicked people that they need to repent. No one in Israel is doing this anymore. How many songs have I myself written to this effect? Thank you for telling us that worship is about the heart too. Thank you for writing this Psalm for us. I'll sleep well tonight.”**

But he wouldn't. He didn't.

One author writes, “Intriguingly, here (reading Ps 50 as prelude to 51 [which seems most likely that it is why it was placed just here]) the royal appointee, the staff priest [Asaph], challenges the king himself.”<sup>10</sup> But David *doesn't* hear it. He hears one thing, but not the right thing. David can't hear it. He has sinned and is not repentant. But David must see himself in Psalm 50, not others. This is “precisely the gift provided by God through the prophet Nathan”<sup>11</sup> that we will not uncover.

All I want you to remember at this point is that Nathan, as God's prophet, has the unenviable vocation of going to the king and telling him when he has violated God's law. Not an enviable task. Nathan could have just told him point blank, but it would not have had the effect that his clever parable had in getting David to realize that “**he is the man.**”

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick J. Gaiser, “The David of Psalm 51: Reading Psalm 51 in Light of Psalm 50,” *Word & World* 23:4 (Fall 2003), 390-91 [382-94].

[https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/23-4\\_David/23-4\\_Gaiser.pdf](https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/23-4_David/23-4_Gaiser.pdf).

Really, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to this article. It forms the basic outline of the sermon, gives a couple of pages of chiasmic notes that show the literary relationship between Psalm 50-51, and is yet the only thing I was able to find that thought reading these two psalms together could be beneficial, even though his analysis shows objective reasons to do this very thing.

The only other source I found that talked about these two Psalms together was Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 236. “50-51. “The Righteous God and His Penitent People.”

<sup>11</sup> Gaiser, 383.

“Oh, great and mighty King David, listen to my tale. Then make your judgment.”

“Sure thing. Proceed, prophet of God.”

“There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which his had bought. He raised it, cared for it. It grew up with him and his children. It was so precious to him that it even ate his morsels and drank from his cup and lay down in his arms. It was a daughter to him, his very soul.

“One day, a traveler came to the rich man, and he didn’t want to take one of his own flock to prepare a meal for him. So he took the poor man’s lamb, slaughtered it, and had a great feast in honor of this strange who came to his midst.”

David anger was greatly kindle against the rich man and swore, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die. He shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

“David. You are the man” (2Sa 12:1-6).

We think we know the story from 2 Samuel 12. But did you know that the very same story is told in the way that Psalm 50-51 are put together? Asaph is the one telling it, but

Nathan is the one who has to reveal it. The superscript of all things becomes the lynchpin—the center of a great chiasm between these two songs.

A 50:1–6 On Zion and sacrifice

B 50:7–15 On sacrifice and deliverance

C 50:16–21 The rebuke

D 50:22–23 Call to repentance/divine wrath

**E 51:superscript Nathan oracle**

D<sup>1</sup> 51:1–2 Turn to God/divine grace

C<sup>1</sup> 51:3–9 Confession

B<sup>1</sup> 51:10–17 On deliverance and sacrifice

A<sup>1</sup> 51:18–19 On Zion and sacrifice<sup>12</sup>

## Psalm 51

PS 51:1-2: CALL TO REPENT/WRATH BECOMES  
REPENTANCE/GRACE

We are all familiar with Psalm 51 as perhaps the greatest song of repentance in the Bible. But did you know that **it follows in reverse order** the flow of Psalm 50? Psalm 50 ends with a great call to repentance, otherwise you will face

<sup>12</sup> **Gaiser**, 388. I'll give one of the larger chiasms at the end of the sermon.

divine wrath. Once God uses the **prophet** to open the eyes of the **king**, the words of the **priest** finally hit their mark and David immediately repents. His very first words:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin!” (Ps 51:1-2)

Mark this, you who forget God, lest he tear you apart and there be none to deliver. The proper response to Psalm 50 is not to say, “**Well done, preacher,**” and go your merry way because the word has hit that evil person. **You are the man!** The only proper response to Psalm 50 is to immediately fall on your knees and repent. But Luther warns here, “[I]f you believe that God is wrathful, you will certainly have Him wrathful and hostile to you.”<sup>13</sup> That is why you must believe that he is *merciful* and *kind* to those to remember him. Only then will you turn to him.

David’s great transgression took tremendous grace from God for him to admit. He wasn’t going to do it of himself.

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<sup>13</sup> **Martin Luther**, “Psalm 51,” in *LW*, 12:322

He knew too well how bad the things were that he had done. He couldn't tell anyone, including even himself. After all, how could the singer of Israel, the one after God's own heart ever admit himself to be such a failure? He realizes this grace, that God did not destroy him through Nathan. Instead, he brought him to his knees, and David cries out for mercy according to the exact pattern his friend Asaph sang about, as he remembers his God. Beloved, that is the only thing there is to do. Because you are a failure and you have sinned greatly against God every day of your life. It isn't just "the great sin" that needs confession. It is all sin. But God is gracious and his covenant love never fails, even when you do. He will blot out your transgressions and wash you and cleanse you of all your sin.

#### Ps 51:3-9: THE REBUKE BECOMES A CONFESSION

But you must also **confess them**. **Psalm 50:16-21** was a great rebuke against "The wicked." What right do you have to recite God's statutes or take his covenant on your lips when you are a thief and an adulterer and your tongue is always against your brother, your own mother's son? Do

not think that God is like you. Listen to his rebuke and confess your sin.

“For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
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.  
Behold I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.  
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
And you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear the joy of gladness;  
Let the bones that you have broken rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.” (3-9)

Ps 51:10-17: SACRIFICE AND DELIVERANCE BECOMES  
DELIVERANCE AND SACRIFICE

Psalm 50:7-15 taught us that God does not need our **sacrifices**. Everything is his. But he desires our sacrifices *of*

*thanksgiving*, that our hearts line up with our religious tongues, and that we call upon him in the day of trouble. Then he will **deliver** us. So, David heeds the words of Asaph, following them in reverse order. First, he calls upon God in his day of trouble—the trouble he brought upon himself. He cries to God to deliver him:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence,  
And take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Then he begins to sing about sacrifice:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
And uphold me with a willing spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
And sinners will return to you.  
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth will declare your praise.  
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.” (51:10-17)

He realizes now that outward worship is not enough. God has used the Levite he appointed to write Psalm 50 to dig the word into his heart.

#### Ps 51:18-19: ON ZION AND SACRIFICE AGAIN

Psalm 50 begins on Mt. Zion, the very place David’s great transgression took place. David, as king, represents his people. As he goes, so they go. In Psalm 50, God is the one thundering. His Word summoned the whole earth to hear his objection against his people. His fiery Spirit put them in awe. The Beauty of the Glory of God resounded for what it is. Heaven and earth saw it and were silent.

Now David can see the beauty of God again, for he has opened the wound of his soul, the poison has been drawn out, and God has forgiven him. David can tell the world what has happened, because God would not let him hear Psalm 50 without also heeding it. And so he opens his mouth a final time:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
    build up the walls of Jerusalem;  
Then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
    In burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
    Then bulls will be offered on your altar. (50:18-19)

There are some things in Psalm 51 that are strange, and many we must still look at. “Take not your Holy Spirit from me?” God isn’t but is pleased with animal sacrifices? I believe that David’s great prayer of repentance actually ends with a small prophecy. Through the King, he asks God to do good to all of Zion because it is His good pleasure to do so. He asks for the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, because sin has destroyed them.

This is the very work that the King of kings came to accomplish, and he is even now doing greater works as his people hear the word and repent and turn to him. In turn, he is rebuilding Jerusalem into a *heavenly* city, a holy bride that the sons of Korah sang about. And Zion is glorious once again, because the only Right Sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world has been offered and accepted by God in heaven who looks down on the children

of men from his lofty roof ... and takes pity on them because of his good pleasure. And through the Great Prophet, Priest, and King he is calling you not to leave this place until you heed the message of Psalm 50 by singing and doing Psalm 51 today, tomorrow, and until the very End of the Age when there will be no more crying or sin or tears in heaven for those who know the love of God through Christ Jesus the Lord.

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## A Second Way to See the Chiasm

- A** 50:2, 5 Out of **ZION**...a covenant with me by **SACRIFICE** (זָבַח/צִיּוֹן)
- B** 50:8 your **BURNT OFFERINGS** are continually before me (עֹלָה)
- C** 50:9 I will not accept a bull from your house
- D** 50:15 call on me...I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me
- E** 50:18–20 recitation of Decalogue
- F** 50:20 You slander your own **MOTHER'S** child (אִם)
- G** 50:22 call to repentance: you who forget **GOD** (אֱלֹהִים)
- H 51: superscript Nathan's oracle (the turning point)**
- G<sup>1</sup>** 51:1 prayer of repentance: have mercy on me, **O GOD** (אֱלֹהִים)
- F<sup>1</sup>** 51:5 a sinner when my **MOTHER** conceived me (אִם)
- E<sup>1</sup>** 51:6 teach me wisdom
- D<sup>1</sup>** 51:14 deliver me from bloodshed...and my tongue will sing aloud
- C<sup>1</sup>** 51:16 you have no delight in sacrifice
- B<sup>1</sup>** 51:16 if I were to give a **BURNT OFFERING** (עֹלָה)
- A<sup>1</sup>** 51:18, 19 Do good to **ZION**...then you will delight in right **SACRIFICE** (זָבַח/צִיּוֹן)