

LESSON 1

PSALMS 51—54

PSALM 51: PLEADING FOR RESTORATION

Although this psalm is a heart-wrenching, penitential plea for forgiveness, the fourth of the seven such confessional psalms included in the Psalter (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143), it would be considered one of the most popular of all the psalms. Its announcement of God's grace for a sinner is one of the clearest and most touching supplications in all of literature.

The primary request of David's prayer is that he might be restored to God. He had been away from Him, and his guilt-ridden heart had become cold and unfeeling. Life for him had become lonely and filled with fear; it had descended into an existence that was hounded by a tormenting conscience. He was a shriveled up, lost spirit in a physical body.

The psalm is seen at once as an individual lament, an impassioned cry for forgiveness by a man who had been estranged from the sweetest of all fellowships. The text of the psalm gives evidence that the psalm has had a dual use—private as well as public. Undoubtedly, the psalm was and is used as a community and national lament for corporate sins. The latter part of the psalm, verses 17 through 19, seems to be evidence that the psalm was later adapted under an inspired hand for the public use of the nation as a whole.

1. How does the psalmist describe the consequences of sin?
2. Where do we see David's faith in God's mercy?
3. Why does David exaggerate to portray sin and restoration?
4. Where do we see David's commitment to righteousness?

**PSALM 52:
TRAGEDY OR GLORY?**

This piece of Hebrew poetry is typically designated a didactic poem, a psalm of wisdom, or a teaching song. It puts before us the stark contrast between the tragedy of an evil tongue and the glory of a godly life.

In prayer, the writer speaks to God about the evil, tyrannical man who has destroyed others and brags in godless glee about what he has done. His supplication has the nature of an announcement of God's condemnation of the wicked. Considered also a complaint or lament psalm, it is the first of eight such psalms which appear in this part of the Psalter in a cluster, stretching out from this psalm to Psalm 59.

After reviewing the catastrophe of wickedness and the glory of righteousness, the writer ends on the high note of trust, vowing that he will spend his days praising God. He begins with a lament but ends by extolling God's goodness.

5. How does God punish those who live dishonestly?
6. What characterizes the dishonest man in this psalm?
7. What is the importance of the imagery describing the results of a righteous life, as well as an ungodly one?
8. Why does the psalmist "laugh" at God's punishment of the wicked (v. 6)?
9. Where does the writer's tone show his faith in God's care?
10. Describe what you think it means to "wait on" God (v. 9).

**PSALM 53:
GODLESS HEARTS**

Inasmuch as Psalms 14 and 53 are twin psalms, it could well be that Psalm 53 is an adaptation of Psalm 14. Verses 5 and 6 of this psalm apparently form the central part of the revision. Other noticeable changes would include a few word choices and the switching of the divine name Yahweh to Elohim. Elohim occurs three times and Yahweh four times in Psalm 14; while in this psalm, Elohim occurs seven times, and Yahweh is not used at all. Typically, Book II of the Psalms emphasizes the name Elohim instead of Yahweh.

The Book of Psalms functioned as a living book of praise, worship, prophecy, teaching, and devotion for Israel. The Holy Spirit at times chose to reshape previous writings for new purposes. A psalm that emerged in one context was some-

times changed slightly to be used in another context. The relationship between Psalm 14 and this psalm shows us how the Holy Spirit inspired a writer to adapt one piece of writing for use in a setting different from its original writing.

11. What does God want from His followers?
12. How is this psalm different from Psalm 14?
13. Which sins are the result of rejecting God?
14. What parallels does the writer draw between righteousness and wisdom?
15. How does the writer use imagery to emphasize the actions of the wicked?

**PSALM 54:
FROM TERROR TO TRUST**

The psalm would be considered a short lament prayer that falls into two sections, as is indicated by the word “Selah.” The first half is a plea for the help needed, and the second half is praise for the help given. The first part specifies the problem that was to be confronted, and the second part supplies the answer for that problem. The psalm moves from petition to praise, from terror to trust.

16. Where do we see the writer’s trust in God’s protection?
17. How can we use this psalm as a teaching psalm today?
18. Can we reconcile David’s prayer for the destruction of Israel’s enemies with our New Testament thinking?
19. How should we pray about our enemies?