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A Devotional Look at Psalm 51:10-12

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In spite of its titled connection with the prophet Nathan's visit to David “after he had gone in to Bath Sheba,” Psalm 51 was probably a prayer of confession by a pious Jew living in Jerusalem in the interim between return from exile and the rebuilding of the walls of the holy city (see verse 18). Aware of the rules of Leviticus 4-5 for the offerings to be made by any male member of the congregation who has sinned either intentionally or unintentionally, the Psalmist asks God for mercy and restoration to a sense of joyous salvation: “Restore to me the joy and assurance of a right relationship with You,” as Leslie F. Brandt translates verse 11 in *Psalms/Now* (Concordia, 1973).

Since this prayer is for any sinner who seeks to be restored to a joyous relationship with the companion he has injured and to God who has witnessed that injury, it could be Cain's after he killed Abel, or David's after he ordered Joab to pull his troops back and leave Bath Sheba's husband exposed close to the walls of Rabbah. Today it could be my prayer when I injure or neglect a friend, brother or wife.

Did either Cain or David lose their salvation? In Cain's day salvation meant escaping the vengeance of his kinfolk. David thought he had escaped the vengeance of Bath Sheba's husband, until Nathan told him how “a certain rich man” took his neighbor's lamb. Nathan told him, however, that God was taking Bath Sheba's child in his place. After the child died, David lived secure that he would finish his term as king. The washings of the psalm symbolize the cleansing of the heart and assure the sinner's welcome to the congregation of the saints. The forgiven psalmist assures other sinners that God “will not despise a broken and contrite heart.” 314. wordsu,

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