

## Broken and Contrite Heart

“The sacrifices of God are a *broken* spirit: a *broken* and a *contrite* heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17)

“**Broken**” *shâbar* (*shaw-bar*) – break in pieces, crush, destroy

The verb *shâbar* occurs 147 times in the OT and the place of first mention is in Gen 19:9 ... “So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to *break down* the door”. Two angels came to visit Lot in Sodom and he had insisted they stay in his house for the night. The evil men of Sodom wanted to get their hands on the angels to perform immoral acts with them and when Lot resisted they tried to break down the door of his house. They wanted to forcefully *destroy* the door.

On several other occasions it is used “to *break the yoke of*” meaning that God will liberate His people from bondage.

However, of significance, in a large number of instances (Ex 23:24; Ex 34:13; Deut 7:5; 2King 11:18; 2King 18:14; 2Chr 14:3; 2Chr 23:17; 2Chr 31:1; Chr 34:4; Isa 21:9; Jer 43:13; Jer 52:17; Eze 6:4; Eze 6:66) it is used in the context of *destroying idols* where it means to “*smash to smithereens*”.

“**Contrite**” *dâkâh* (*daw-kaw*) – crushed, broken, contrite

It means to pound, or beat until crushed as into powder. Some theologians distinguish between *attritio* (repentance in fear) and *contritio* (repentance accompanied with love for God and purpose to amend the life). Of significance is the fact that talc, which is a mineral (stone) consisting of hydrated magnesium silicate, when crushed or contrited forms talcum powder. So talcum powder is simply “contrited stone”. In its natural form the talc stone is hard and of not much use, but when crushed very, very finely it yields the lovely, fragrant talcum powder that we use on babies and which the ladies like to use for cosmetic purposes. Out of something hard and harsh comes something soft, fragrant and beautiful when it is in its contrited, or finely crushed form.

So when we put these meanings back into Psalm 51:17 we can get a clearer picture of what David is really saying when he says ... “a *broken* and a *contrite* heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”:

A *broken* heart is one in which all the “idols” (all the things that displace God from first place in our lives) are *broken* or *smashed to smithereens* and God is restored to His rightful place as Lord and Master and our “first love”. All “yokes of bondage” must be broken, totally destroyed. We are to be His bond-servants and not servants of sin.

A *contrite* heart is one in which all hardness of heart, arrogance and wrong choices are dealt a blow, totally crushed and pulverised, until only the sweet fragrance of our love for God remains and comes forth. The alabaster “box” had to be broken to release the fragrance of the perfume for the Master to enjoy (Mk 14:3).

This brokenness and contrition of heart is essential when worship is offered to the Lord. It is a timeless principal of true worship. This is the worship that God will cherish and not despise. It is this contrition of heart, the repentance accompanied with love for God and an accompanying resolve to walk uprightly and humbly before God, which he desires of us and which is a sweet fragrance to Him.