

Psalm 32

Translation & Commentary

by James Jordan

a By David.

b Maskil.

- A**
- 1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
2 Whose impurity is covered up.
3 How blessed is the man whom Yahweh does not impute liability,
4 And in whose spirit there is no deceit.
5 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away,
6 Through my groaning all day long.
B
7 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.
8 My best oil was turned into the draught of summer.
9 I acknowledged my impurity to You,
10 And my liability I did not cover up;
A'
11 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh";
12 And it was You who forgave the liability of my impurity.
- 13 Therefore, let everyone who is godly (hasid) pray to You in a time when
you may be found,
C
14 Surely when the many waters rise they will not reach him.
15 You are my hiding place; from trouble You preserve me;
16 With songs of deliverance You surround me.
17 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
18 I will counsel you with Mine eye upon you.
D
19 Do not be like a horse, like a mule, having no understanding.
20 By bit and bridle he is harnessed for control; he does not come
near you.
21 Many are the sorrows of the wicked;
C'
22 But he who trusts in Yahweh: Lovingkindness (hesed) surrounds him.
23 Be glad in Yahweh and rejoice you righteous ones,
24 And sing out all you who are upright in heart.

Commentary

Psalm 32 is the first part of Ps. 32-33, ending with a call to praise that is answered by what follows. Ultimately the psalm needs to be considered as a whole, but what we call Psalm 32 does have its own structure and logic, so we'll take it up separately here.

It is often noted that the opening lines of Psalm 32 remind us of Psalm 1, save that while in Psalm 1 the man is blessed who obeys, here the man ('adam, line 3) is blessed whose sin is forgiven. We are encouraged to compare these



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two psalms by the use of many common words and ideas: day and night, way, wicked, righteous, and the hint of tree imagery in the “best oil” in line 8. (This word only appears elsewhere in Numbers 11:8, where it refers to the best part of olive oil pressings.)

Psalm 32 is structured in two halves, which are clearly indicated by repeated words, put in bold-face in our translation.

Three basic aspects of man’s estrangement from God are in view in the A sections:

- transgression, or basic sin and disobedience;
- impurity, usually translated “sin” but really meaning the defiling, death-result of sin; and
- liability, usually translated “iniquity” but actually meaning the legal guilt incurred by sin.

The two A sections tell us that if we do not try to cover up our guilt, but confess our sins/transgressions to God, He will cover them up for us and remove our legal liabilities. The fourth line tells us that the man who admits his sin is a man who is not deceiving himself and others. We are reminded of what Romans 1 says later on, that self-deception is of the essence of sin (Romans 1:18-22).

The B section is quite descriptive and accurate about what happens to us when we aren’t open with God: we feel fatigued; we may twist in agony when we think about what might happen to us if we admit what we’ve done wrong; all the best “fatness” of our life dries up.

The second half of the Psalm encourages us to learn from David’s experience, and the two C sections reverse the pain and agony of the B section. David says for us to be quick about confessing our sins to God, because the sooner we do so, the sooner we will again experience His protection and the sooner our joy will return.

The central D section brings us back to Psalm 1 themes: Those who have confessed sin and been forgiven can now receive instruction and be planted by the rivers of water. The wicked, like chaff in Psalm 1, are here compared to wild horses and mules who don’t come near to human beings and who have to be forced into obedience.



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