



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 32

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Psalm of David. A Contemplation*.
- According to the Hebrew origin, the title is Maschil (maskhîl) A Psalm of David, giving instruction; an instructive Psalm
- Because it gives the greatest instruction about the feeling of guilt of sinning and the great blessing of forgiveness
- Maschil (maskhîl) is also believed to be the name of the melody used in singing this psalm
- Or, it may point to the name of the musical instrument used together with it
- This Psalm is full of instruction and contemplation, and it is worthy of meditation, as indicated by the frequent repetition of Selah, three times in only eleven verses



Introduction

- This Psalm is a one of 7 Repentant Psalms (6,38,51,102,130,143)
- It had been composed by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah
- Psalms 51 may be the first heartfelt prayer for forgiveness; while this Psalm, written after it, records his experience for the warning and instruction of others, in fulfilment of the promise in Psalm 51:13, *"I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You."*



Introduction

- It was said that St. Augustine used often to read this Psalm with weeping heart and eyes and had it before his death written on the wall over his sick-bed, that he might exercise himself therein, and find comfort therein in his sickness
- The Psalmist describes the blessedness of forgiveness, and teaches that repentance is an essential condition for receiving it in verse 2 & 3
- He had sinned grievously, and refused to acknowledge his sin so he suffered inward torture, verses 3 & 4
- But confession brought instant forgiveness, verse 5



Introduction

- Reflecting from his own experience, he exhorts and urges the saintly and holy people to prayer, verse 6
- Professing his trust in the Lord, he receives from Him a gracious promise of guidance, verses 7 & 8
- Then addressing men in general, he warns them against the foolishness of resisting God's will and contrasts the share of the godly and the wicked, verse 9 & 10
- The Psalm concludes with an exhortation to the righteous to rejoice, verse 11



Introduction

Psalm Outline:

- The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2
- The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4
- The Goodness of Confession and Forgiveness 32:5
- The Divine Protection 32:6-7
- The Divine Guidance 32:8-9
- The Blessings of Mercy and Joy 32:10-11



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- Psalm 1 tells the way to be blessed, “*walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*”
- Yet if one has failed to do this and fallen into sin, Psalm 32 shows another way to be blessed – to make full confession and repentance of sin
- David spoke of the great blessing there is for a person who knows the forgiveness of God
- His sin is no longer exposed; it *is covered*



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- David had great opportunity to know this blessedness in his own life
- No one can fairly appreciate the value of health until they have had to mourn the loss of it
- It was only when David tasted the bitterness of sin that he first began to feel the sweetness of purity
- David knew what it was like to be a guilty sinner
- He knew the seriousness of sin and how good it is to be truly *forgiven*



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- *Whose sin is covered*, Means forgiven, literally, "taken away," opposed to retained (John 20:23)
- God no longer regards the sin (Psalm 85:2-3)
- *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity*, Whom God does not charge him with the guilt of his sins, as he justly might, but absolves and accepts him in Christ
- *in whose spirit there is no deceit*, Who freely confesses all his sins, sincerely, he is truly sorry for, and genuinely hates them, and turns from sin to God with all his heart



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- David used three words to describe sin in these first two verses
- *Transgression*, signifies the passing over a boundary, doing what is prohibited
- Transgression must be *forgiven*, the lifting of a burden or a debt
- *Sin*, signifies the missing of a mark, not doing what was commanded; but is often taken to express sinfulness
- *Sin* must be *covered*, is that of sacrificial blood covering sin
- *Iniquity*, any thing morally distorted, illegal and what is contrary to equity or justice
- *Iniquity* must not be *imputed*, it does not count against a person



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- The sinner who enjoys the forgiveness of his sins and covering them by the blood of the Savior, and is counted as innocent, bears no *deceit* in his heart, nor in his mind or mouth
- “He does not say: ‘Blessed is he who commits no transgression’, but says: ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven’. For if you search for someone who commits no transgression, you will find none; how then could he be blessed? He is blessed if his transgressions are forgiven, and what he has committed are covered.” St. Justine, the Martyr



The Divine Forgiveness 32:1-2

- This is why the sacrament of confession is so important, because it gives us an opportunity to get our soul back to the place it was at baptism, for the older person to die and for a new person to arise
- And this is why we receive Holy Communion weekly and pray daily, as a way for our sins to be covered by the grace of God
- “If the serpent, the devil, bites someone secretly, he infects that person with the venom of sin. And if the one who has been bitten keeps silence and does not do penance, and does not want to confess his wound . . . then his brother and his master, who have the word [of absolution] that will cure him, cannot very well assist him” St. Jerome

The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4



- The now-forgiven David remembered his spiritual and mental state when he kept his sin hidden and was *silent* instead of confessing and repenting
- The stress of a double life and unconfessed sin made him feel oppressed and dry
- He says, *I kept silence*, not merely I was silent, but I *kept* silence
- Did not confess his sin at once, sought to hide and conceal it
- He not only did not admit his crime of adultery, but he sought by all means to refuse all knowledge of it
- David had no fellowship with God for as long as he was *silent* about his sin

The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4



- His joy in life was gone, replaced with bitterness and anguish
- David like us, was miserable until he confessed all of his sins to God and was forgiven
- When the heart is full of guilt, it makes the body feel bad too
- Sinful living brings only sorrow and pain
- *Your hand was heavy upon me*, Meaning the afflicting hand of God, which is sever, grave, and heavy to be borne
- St. Augustine says, "I was made miserable by knowing my misery, being pricked with an evil conscience."
- David suffered many hardships in punishment of his sins

The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4



- The child born in adultery died an infant
- His daughter Tamar was assaulted by her own brother, Amon
- The same Amon was slain by his brother Absalom
- And Absalom himself, in rebellion against his father, was slain
- All matters of deep sorrow and grief to David
- According to St. John Chrysostom, God opens before us many ways to wipe out our iniquities, one of which is to confess our sins, and to always remember them
- *My vitality was turned into the drought of summer*, David's dryness and misery were actually a good thing

The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4



- They demonstrated that he was in fact a son of God
- God would not allow him to remain comfortable in unconfessed sin
- One who feels no misery or dryness in such a state has far greater concerns for current time and eternity
- This work of the Holy Spirit, convicting us of our sin and hardness of heart, is an essential mark of those who truly belong to God
- *Selah*, Some think it is a musical note or, the change of the note or tune of the song

The Agony of Unconfessed Hidden Sin 32:3-4



- Others understand it as a pause, a full stop for a while; and as a note of attention
- Others consider it as an affirmation of the truth of anything, and interpret it "verily", "truly", as, answering to "Amen"; so be it, so it is, or shall be; it is the truth of the thing, and Aben Ezra agrees on this sense
- Selah also can be used to take a pause and to reflect on the meaning of the verse before continuing to read the rest of the passage

The Goodness of Confession and Forgiveness 32:5



- David confessed his sin fully and freely; confessed it as *sin*, as *iniquity*, and as *transgression*
- Forgiveness was ready and waiting for David as he confessed to God and acknowledge the nature and guilt of his sin
- Restoration was ready, but the confession of sin was the path to it
- As it is recorded in Acts 19:17-20, *many who believed came confessing and telling their deeds*
- Christians were getting right with God, and confession was part of it
- David proclaims that he has not hidden his sin, for he knows that whoever hides his sin, does not deceive God but deceives himself

The Goodness of Confession and Forgiveness 32:5



- David was confident in the mercy of the Lord
- He confessed and experienced this forgiveness immediately, just as the prodigal son confessed and was immediately forgiven
- But why he was forgiven immediately?
- Because David offered a sincere confession by the mouth and offered an inward confession in his heart accompanied with sorrowful repentance begging of forgiveness for sin and for the offence made to the Divine Majesty, and he stopped covering his iniquity, then God forgave the iniquity of his sin

The Goodness of Confession and Forgiveness 32:5



- It is useless to hid our sins, for it is well known to God
- It is only helpful to us to own it, because a full sincere confession softens and humbles the heart
- We see here that not only David's sin itself was forgiven, but the *iniquity* of it
- The feeling of its guilt was put away, and that at once, so soon as the acknowledgment was made
- *Selah*, May mean here Amen, it is true



The Divine Protection 32:6-7

- *For this cause*, Meaning that his success in acknowledging his sin, would encourage others also to take a similar step, and make their supplications to the Lord also
- Every godly person should pray to God for the same blessing of forgiveness
- *Godly*, Every sincere virtuous person that is truly holy, truly repentant, and, having begun to hate sin
- Forgiveness of sin is to be prayed for as Jesus Christ taught us, “And forgive us our sins,” (Luke 11:4)
- As long as we seek God, we shall find Him



The Divine Protection 32:6-7

- Knowing that God is so great in forgiving mercy gives the *godly* a greater reason to seek God in the confidence that He *may be found*
- But let no one delay, for there is also a time of not finding, “*Then they will call on Me, but I will not answer; they will seek Me diligently, but they will not find me.*” (Proverbs 1:28)
- Seek Him before the time of mercy passes away, before it is too late
- *in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him*, In a time of trouble and hardship, he will not be overwhelmed, but will be safe like one who stands secure upon a rock out of reach of the raging flood



The Divine Protection 32:6-7

- St. Augustine comments on the *flood of great waters, and says*, “nevertheless, let none think, when the end has come suddenly, as in the days of Noah, that there remains a place of confession, whereby he may draw near unto God.”
- David gloried in the protection he now felt as one in fellowship with God and under His care
- God Himself was his *hiding place*, a secure shelter
- Honest and full confession made David who in the verse 4 was oppressed by the presence of God, *For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me*, now finds a shelter in Him



The Divine Guidance 32:8-9

- Here God speaks in answer to the Psalmist's profession of trust
- Through this, God promised to *instruct, teach, and guide* His people
- *Instruct*, Inward wisdom and good judgment, to enable him to guard against the snares of his enemies
- Then the outward assistance of the providence of God, without which even the wisest get into the greatest difficulties, *teach you in the way you should go*
- *I will guide you with My eye*, I will not take them off you, but I will steadily and constantly look upon you with an eye of benevolence and gentleness



The Divine Guidance 32:8-9

- This is a great blessing that comes from being forgiven and having our fellowship restored
- As long as the believer delivers his life to God, the Lord will guide him along His path, granting him the spirit of wisdom and understanding
- And as long as he hold his eyes fast upon the Lord, the Lord will hold His eyes upon him
- But he, who rejects the counsel of God, will become without understanding, counted by the psalmist as a *horse or mule*; for the understanding is what distinguishes us from the irrational animals



The Divine Guidance 32:8-9

- This warning is addressed to all who resist God's will, and neglect instruction
- It would be enough for a father to look at his son; for through understanding, the son would hasten to correct his wrongdoing
- Whereas, for the *horse or the mule*, the mere looks of their master would not be enough, but they would need *a bit or a bridle* to *harness* and lead them
- They are without *understanding* or reason, so they must be controlled and compelled by force to learn to submit to man's will



The Divine Guidance 32:8-9

- If a man will not draw near to God and obey Him of his own free will, he lowers himself to the level of a *horse or a mule*, and must expect to be treated accordingly and disciplined by judgment (Isaiah 26:9-11)
- David understood this to describe his condition in his season of unconfessed sin
- He was like a stubborn animal that could only be guided through pain or severity
- The Savior's look was enough to humble St. Peter's soul
- Whereas the proud soul would need the *bridle* of cruel temptations to make her come back close to Him by repentance

The Blessings of Mercy and Joy

32:10-11



- Verse 10 is an explanation of the *bit and bridle*
- The unrepentant sinner, still attached to sin, will be afflicted with many suffering and difficulties, both in this world and in the next
- For, though sinners sometimes prosper, their sinful state is a most grievous punishment, bringing with it countless punishments, anxieties, fears, dangers, etc.,
- God, being a just judge, adds many other afflictions; and, unless the sinner repent, and pray to God in the fitting season, he will undoubtedly come under the everlasting condemnation

The Blessings of Mercy and Joy

32:10-11



- On the other hand, the man *who trusts in the LORD*, and not in human vanity, is surrounded by the divine mercy, that affliction cannot touch him
- Now, the divine mercy is the fountain of all good, and, therefore, when he says, *mercy shall surround him*, he means to give us some idea of the immense amount of blessings that those who attach themselves to God alone shall abundantly enjoy
- David understood what it was to live (at least for a season) as *the wicked*, and the *sorrows* that came with it
- The repentant David then had a renewed experience of the *mercy* of God surrounding him

The Blessings of Mercy and Joy

32:10-11



- David's psalms almost always end with a note of joy
- This psalm gives repeated and compelling reasons for the believer to *be glad*, to *rejoice*, to *shout for joy*
- The psalm appropriately ends with a call for God's people to remember and respond to those reasons
- They rejoice in the Lord as the Forgiver of their sins, as their refuge, as the Guide of their life, and as the Source of their glory
- Their joy is in the Lord, not by the temporal riches, nor by the earthly things
- The Psalm started by giving blessing to those whose sins are forgiven; and ended by rejoicing in the Lord



Discussion

- How many different words does David use for sin? Why does he use these words?
- How does David describe sin's effect in his life?
- What is the main difference between keeping silent versus confessing?
- How does God respond to David's confession?



Discussion

- How does David respond to God's forgiveness?
- What are the 3 things that God will do subsequent to forgiveness of sin that are the most effective means of not revisiting sin?
- How would a soft heart manifest itself?
- What would lead David to direct people to be glad, rejoice and shout for joy? Where is he believing that would come from?