

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 32)

R. (cf. 5c) **Lord, forgive the wrong I have done.**

Blessed is the one whose fault is taken away,
whose sin is covered.

Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt,
in whose spirit there is no guile.

R. **Lord, forgive the wrong I have done.**

I acknowledged my sin to you,
my guilt I covered not.

I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD,"
and you took away the guilt of my sin.

R. **Lord, forgive the wrong I have done.**

You are my shelter; from distress you will preserve me;
with glad cries of freedom you will ring me round.

R. **Lord, forgive the wrong I have done.**

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart.

R. **Lord, forgive the wrong I have done.**

Jerome Biblical Commentary

. Although this is usually classified as a thanksgiving Ps, perhaps it is better considered as a wisdom Ps. The wisdom elements (1-2, 8-11) serve as a wrapper for a thanksgiving testimony (3-7) that is directly addressed to God. The testimony exists only for the lesson that the author wants to communicate ("for this shall every man pray to you," v. 6; cf. Murphy in [VTSup](#) 9, 162). Structure: 1-2, macarism formula, a reflection on his past experience; 3-7, a description of this experience with the lesson that flows from it; 8-9, teaching and admonition; 9-10, a contrast between the faithful and the wicked, with a command to rejoice. **1-2.** *The 'ašrē formula is frequent in wisdom literature as a classic form of moral exhortation. These verses are not to be read in the light of the theology of the scholastics and the reformers; they tell us nothing about the intrinsic nature of justification. The phrases "cover" and "impure" are anthropomorphic descriptions of God's forgiveness, and they are frequent in the OT.* Verses 1-2 are the conclusion to which the psalmist has come and the lesson that he inculcates. **3-5.** *as long as....:* His suffering finally led him to the realization of his sin, and led him to "speak," acknowledging it (5); thus, his admission of sin brings pardon. **6-7.** *for this:* Refers to his experience, which becomes a lesson for those whom he would instruct. *deep waters:* Symbolic of death (Ps 18:5-6, 17). **8-9.** He speaks as a sage (Kraus would make this a divine oracle communicated through the priest). The advice in 9bc is not clear; the [CCD](#) can be understood as urging a willing submission to Yahweh lest he be forced to violent treatment. **10.** After indicating the benefits of confession and pardon, he

has a word about the wicked, in contrast to "him who trusts." This Ps is the second of the traditional seven penitential Pss.

VTSup Vetus Testamentum Supplements (Leiden)

OT Old Testament

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Notes & Commentary:

Ver. 1. Understanding; (Protestants *mascil.*; Haydock) shewing how he was brought to acknowledge his fault, and by penance to obtain pardon, (Worthington) justly giving the glory to God's grace. (St. Augustine) --- Alexandrian Septuagint, ["A psalm] to David," *of understanding*; which is taken from some other copy. (Haydock) --- Some suppose this word has been inserted from ver 8. (Abenezra) --- But there are several other psalms which have this title, (Haydock) intimating either that they contain great mysteries, (Eusebius) or that they are easy to understand. (Agellius) --- This is wholly of a moral nature. The Jews styled it the *heart* of David, because it displays his sentiments of contrition. (Calmet) --- He composed it most probably after Nathan had engaged him to confess his fault. [2 Kings xii.] (Bellarmine) --- It might be used on the solemn feast of expiation. (Grotius, Numbers xxix. 7.) --- the Fathers explain it of the grace which we receive in baptism and in penance. (St. Augustine; St. Gregory, &c.) (Calmet) --- *Are they*. Hebrew, "The blessings of him whose iniquity." (Pagnin) --- But the sense is the same, and St. Paul follows the Septuagint, which gives their version the highest authority, Romans iv. 7. --- *Sins*; or, "who is screened from the punishment of sin." (Prin. disc.) Sin has often this signification; and the psalmist would otherwise seem to say less than he had already expressed. (Berthier) --- *Covered*, by charity, (1 Peter iv.) as a physician covers a wound, to remove it entirely; and we must cover our former transgressions, by doing good works. (St. Gregory) --- Then our sins will not appear at the day of judgment, (St. Jerome) nor be punished, as they are wholly destroyed. The Pelagians calumniated Catholics, as if they taught that sins were only shaven, as it were, the roots still remaining; which St. Augustine (*contra 2 ep. Pelag.* i. 13.) says, "None affirmeth but an infidel." Thus the doctrine of Calvin is condemned; who abuses these texts to prove that sins are only covered, and still remain even in the most just; which is contrary to innumerable passages of Scripture, (Isaias vi., John i., 1 Corinthians vi., &c.) and injurious to the perfections of God, and to the redemption of Christ, as well as to the saints in heaven, who are thus represented as still infected with all their sins. (Worthington) --- This doctrine is now almost abandoned by Protestants, as it is contrary both to sound philosophy and divinity: for sin is nothing physical, but a want of moral rectitude. (Berthier) --- God cannot fail to punish sin, wherever it really subsists. His spirit is surely free from *guile*. He cannot suppose that we are just by

imputation of Christ's justice, unless we be really so. (Haydock) --- By means of the sacraments the sinner becomes just, and God sees nothing in him deserving of punishment. (Calmet) --- "If any one wishes his sins to be covered, let him manifest them to God, by the voice of confession." (St. Gregory) --- But, replies a Lutheran commentator, "God does not forget sin." What is this to the purpose, as long as the sin does not subsist in the offender? He allows that "the pardon of sin is inseparable from sanctification." *Renew a right spirit within my bowels*, Psalm I. 12. (Berthier) --- The man who has felt real compunction, will be able to form a true notion of the happiness of a reconciliation. (Calmet) --- Covering may allude to the custom of writing on wax, which might easily be effaced. Our sins are recorded in the book of God's justice. (Menochius)

Ver. 2. Spirit. Symmachus has "heart," or "mouth." (Calmet) --- The latter is also in some copies of the Septuagint. (Eusebius) --- The Roman and Alexandrian Septuagint have it, though Grabe substitutes *spirit*, (Haydock) which is recognised by St. Jerome (ad. Sun.), Hebrew, &c. Nothing is so contrary to true repentance as hypocrisy. (St. Augustine, &c.) (Calmet) --- If we do not co-operate with God's grace, our sins will never be effaced, though, before remission, our works can only dispose us to receive pardon. "God (and meritorious) works follow." (St. Augustine) (Worthington)

Ver. 3. Because I was silent, &c. That is, whilst I kept silence, by concealing, or refusing to confess my sins, thy hand was heavy upon me, &c. (Challoner) --- The cry was then only an effect of vanity, like that of the Pharisee, full of his own merits; (St. Augustine; St. Jerome; Calmet) or David was silent till Nathan made him know his fault, which he afterwards ceased not to deplore. (Theodoret) --- It is supposed that he had continued impenitent for above a year. But he might fell remorse during that time, ver. 5. (Berthier) --- *Cried.* Hebrew, "roared," like a lion. (Calmet) --- Because I acknowledged not my grievous sins, I was much afflicted. I prayed, but to little purpose. (Worthington) --- Wishing to conceal the cause of my grief, (Calmet) I pined away, (Haydock; Lamentations iii. 4.) and suffered greatly, because I did not confess. (Menochius)

Ver. 4. I am turned, &c. That is, I turn and roll about in my bed, to seek for ease in my pain, whilst the thorn of thy justice pierces my flesh, and sticks fast in me. Or, *I am turned*; that is, I am converted to thee, my God, by being brought to a better understanding by thy chastisements. In the Hebrew it is, *my moisture is turned into the droughts of summer*. (Challoner) (Protestants) (Haydock) --- But the Septuagint may have taken *I* for a preposition before *shaddi*, as the Greek interpreters say nothing of this *moisture*, which is the interpretation of modern Jews; and St. Jerome has (Berthier) "I was turned *or occupied*, in my misery;" *versatus sum in miseria mea*. There is no peace for the wicked. (Haydock) --- God has not punished David exteriorly till after the admonition of Nathan, when so many evils poured upon him. But the king must have experienced cruel agonies of mind, till he was prevailed on by this wise physician to confess his fault, (Calmet) and thus let out the imposthume, which would not allow him to enjoy any repose. --- *Fastened.* St. Jerome, "while the summer (or heat; *aestas*) was burning incessantly," *se/a*. Hebrew *becharbone kayits* means also *in gladios spina*. "The thorn has been turned into swords for my affliction;" (Berthier) or I have been as grievously tormented, as if a thorn or sword had pierced me. (Haydock) --- Thy divine Providence chastises me, and my conscience tells me that I have deserved all my sufferings. (Worthington) --- Many of the ancients read, *while the thorn is broken*,

confringitur, Ps. Rom.[Roman Psalter?]; St. Gregory; Calmet) which causes the extraction to be more difficult. (Haydock) --- This thorn may denote sin, which like a weed, had infected David's soul. (Theodoret) (Calmet)

Ver. 5. Sin. Or as some psalters read, "of my heart," with the Septuagint, Cassiod., &c. (Calmet) --- "I know that thou wilt readily forgive the sins which are fully laid open before thee." (St. Jerome) --- David no sooner perceived that he was the unjust man (Haydock) whom Nathan had described, than he exclaimed, "I have sinned;" and at the same moment God forgave him, 2 Kings xii. 7. (Calmet) --- If this psalm relate to his repentance, it seems he had already had recourse to God; but this is doubtful, as he appears to have entered into himself only after the prophet's reproach. Nothing can more effectually give peace to the soul than an humble confession, which costs human pride a great deal, when it must be made to our brethren. (Berthier) --- The Jews were sometimes obliged to confess to God's minister, Leviticus iv. 5., and Numbers v. 7. (Menochius)

Ver. 6. Holy. Even the angels rejoice at the sinner's conversion, Luke xv. 7. The saints take part in the welfare of their fellow creatures, and praise God for his mercies shewn unto them. (Calmet) --- *Time*. During this life, (Isaias lv. 6., Ecclesiastes ix. 10.; Chaldean; Muis) or when they shall be treated in like manner. (Piscator) --- As I now repent, so must those who are afflicted, pray that they may obtain pardon; then they will not be oppressed, though their miseries may appear very great, like a *deluge*. (Worthington) --- *Yet*. Hebrew *rak*, "surely." (Berthier) --- "Therefore shall every merciful one pray unto Thee, finding time; that when many waters shall inundate, they may not approach unto him." (St. Jerome) (Haydock) --- A deluge denotes great calamities, Isaias xlivi. 2. Even the terrors of the last day will not disturb the just, (Calmet) nor will they inspire the wicked with true repentance. (Haydock)

Ver. 7. Refuge. Hebrew, "hiding," (Psalm xxx. 21.; Haydock) or asylum. (Calmet) --- *Which*. Hebrew, "thou shalt surround me with songs of deliverance. Sela." Or "my praise saving, thou wilt environ me always." (St. Jerome) (Haydock) --- Perhaps *th* may now occupy the place of *m*, as the Greeks all agree; and the sense is at least the same. (Berthier)

Ver. 8. Fix. Hebrew, "consult with my eyes concerning thee." The Vulgate, better. (Calmet) --- Protestants marginal note, "my eye *shall* be upon thee." (Haydock) --- God thus engages to watch over, and direct his servant, (Genesis xliv. 21., and Jeremias xxiv. 6.; Calmet) giving him instruction, by means of chastisements. (Worthington)

Ver. 9. Do not. This may be spoken by God, or by the psalmist; as an admonition to hear the counsel of those divinely commissioned. (Calmet) --- *Who come*. Protestants, "lest they come near," (Haydock) and threaten to bite or to run over *thee*. (Calmet) --- But the Hebrew may be the sense of the Vulgate, *qui non accedunt*. (St. Jerome) --- It may be a prayer, that God would offer a sort of violence to restrain the sallies of the sinner, (Haydock) and to convert him; (Worthington) or God threatens the obstinate with rigour of his justice. Many delude themselves, thinking that he will always treat them with lenity, and be ready to receive them. (Berthier) (Isaias xxxvii. 29.) But the prophet admonishes them not to follow their senses alone, nor to imitate brute beasts, as he had done with regard to Bathsheba and Urias. (Menochius) --- The bit (*camus*) was a sort of muzzle, "to hinder horses from biting." (Xenophon)

Ver. 10. *Many*. Sinners deserve much punishment. But if they will repent they may find mercy. (Worthington) --- This may be also the declaration of God, though the prophet seem to speak in the next verse. (Berthier) --- God humbles the pride of haughty monarchs, like Sennacherib and Nabuchodonosor, treating them like beasts. (Calmet) **Ver. 11.** Glory, which is lawful when God is the object, 1 Corinthians i. 31. *My glory I will not give to another*, Isaias xlvi. 8. (Calmet) --- Hebrew, "praise him." (St. Jerome) (Haydock) --- Joy is the end of true penance, to which the prophet invites all. (Worthington)

Word Biblical Commentary (non-Catholic)

The blessing of forgiveness (32:1–2). The opening wisdom portion of the psalm expresses a general principle concerning the “blessed” or happy estate of a person whose sin is forgiven. On the word “blessed,” see further Ps 1:1, which is also a wisdom psalm. The description presupposes throughout not a sinless person, but a person whose sins are forgiven; the psalmist views humans as sinning beings, whose possibility of happiness lies in the removal and forgiveness of that sin. Three principal terms are employed to designate the dimensions of human evil: (1) *transgression*

(עֵשֶׂת), namely acts reflecting rebellion against God; (2) *sin* (פַּשְׁעָה), the most general term, designating an offense, or turning away from the true path; (3) *iniquity* (עָמֵד), indicating distortion, criminality, or the absence of respect for the divine will. The terms are used within the poetic structure of synonymous parallelism, and thus their potentially distinctive nuances should not be taken too precisely; yet the three terms as a whole specify the full dimensions of human evil, and hence the situation from which a person might be delivered through divine forgiveness, thus finding happiness. (Likewise, the three terms designating the manner of forgiveness are poetically parallel, but taken together, they indicate the completeness of the divine deliverance from evil which makes happiness possible.) The fourth line of the parallel structure (v 2b) refers to the absence of *deceit*; while this too is a sin, it is not here specified as something forgiven. The relevance of the term is to be seen in the means by which forgiveness is granted; the forgiveness implied in the first three lines presupposes repentance and confession (*cf.* v 5), and only when that repentance and confession are honest, devoid of deceit, will the happy estate of forgiveness be experienced.

A personal testimony of repentance (32:3–5). The general principle of wisdom expressed in the opening verses is now clarified in a personal statement. The psalmist first describes the grief which characterized his unrepentant state (vv 3–4), and then by way of contrast declares the deliverance consequent upon repentance and confession (v 5). Though the language is now personal, these verses retain the contrast typical of wisdom poetry; just as Ps 1 contrasts the wicked and the righteous, so here there is a striking contrast between the unrepentant sinner and the sinner who repents and finds forgiveness.

The unrepentant state (vv 3–4) is described as one of “silence”; the silence in context is specifically the absence of confession, in contrast to the speech of confession in v 5. The consequences of unrepentant silence are poetically evoked in physical terms; indeed, the physical language has led some commentators to suggest that there is here a reflection of psychosomatic illness, a bodily reaction to the internally contained conflicts of guilt. But it is more likely that the words should be interpreted in a more general poetic sense. The “groaning” is a consequence of living with guilt and a stifled conscience; the “aging bones” portray the growing weakness of the spiritual life which follows the unhealthy practice of bottling up one’s evil within the soul, steadfastly retaining silence, rather than finding the emancipation of forgiveness through speech. The “heavy hand” of God, experienced within the mind and conscience, indicates an awareness of the need for repentance, but a stubborn refusal to yield to God. And the sinner’s silence, aggravated by the heavy hand of God, contributed to the dry curling of the tongue, as in one desperate for water in a desert; so long as the tongue refused to speak the words of repentance, it curled in speechless pain.

In the words of confession (v 5), the psalmist uses the same three words that appeared in the wisdom introduction (*sin*, *iniquity*, and *transgression*) to indicate the comprehensiveness of his confession. And the confession of the first three lines (v 5a–c) immediately results in the divine forgiveness (v 5d). Confession is like opening the floodgate of a dam. When there is no confession, the waters pile up behind the dam, creating immense pressures on the wall, but as soon as the floodgate is opened, the waters subside and the pressures diminish.

The summoning of the godly to prayer (32:6–8). This section of the psalm has a threefold structure. (1) The psalmist, reflecting upon his own emancipation, summons all the godly to join in prayer for similar deliverance (v 6). (2) There follow the words of the prayer, as spoken by all the godly (v 7). (3) The prayer in turn is followed by the divine words, in oracular form, of the kind that might be delivered by a priest or temple servant in a liturgical context (v 8).

The godly are invited to pray at “a time of stress” (v 6); the precise nuance of these words is probably to be understood in terms of vv 3–4. Whenever the stress of unrepented sin is experienced, that person must turn to God in a prayer of repentance. The metaphor of the “flood of mighty waters” may imply a torrential flood following rain, whose waters would not reach the person who had prayed in confession to God (cf. the “deep waters” in Ps 18:17 [16], where the context implies the ocean).

The words of the prayer specify in various ways the kind of protection the suppliant sought from the Almighty. God would be a hiding place (cf. Ps 27:5); he would offer protection and be a victorious deliverer (the expression “shouts of deliverance” may evoke the battle cries of a conquering warrior). But the response to the prayer (v 8) promises instruction and counsel, rather than direct deliverance. In language reminiscent of the wisdom literature, the words of God contain primarily the promise of instruction concerning the path in which the godly should walk (cf. Ps 1), but contain also the assurance of protection (“... with my eye upon you”) for the one who walked in the divinely ordained path.

The conclusion of wisdom (32:9–10). Although v 9 is sometimes interpreted as part of the divine speech along with v 8 (Kraus, *Psalmen 1–59*, 405), it is preferable to interpret

the verse as the opening of a concluding wisdomtype admonition, although it follows naturally from the wisdom language of the divine speech (v 8). The simile of v 9 develops in more detail the wisdom of Proverbs: “the whip for a horse, the bridle for an ass, the rod for the fool’s back” (Prov 26:3). The godly one is advised not to be stubborn, like a mulish horse (cf. Anderson, *Psalms I*, 259), that constantly requires restraint lest it gallop away by itself. While it is possible that the psalmist is referring to stubborn sinfulness in general, the more immediate implication of the words is to be found in the stubborn resistance to confession of sin, already stated in vv 3–4. Such stubborn resistance brings only grief, whereas the one whose trust in the Lord leads to confession of sin may know God’s loving kindness. In other words, the “godly one”

(תִּסְפֵּר, v 6) will experience the divine lovingkindness (תָּהֹל, v 10).

Concluding praise (32:11). The concluding words, urging the praise of God, are typical of a hymn of thanksgiving. Nevertheless, they are integrated with the substance of the psalm, particularly in the reference to the “righteous ones” (צַדִּיקִים), who in the tradition of wisdom are those that choose to walk in the right path (Ps 1:5–6).

Explanation

When perceived primarily as a literary composition, Ps 32 conveys to its reader some fundamental wisdom. In the words of St. Augustine, that wisdom is: *intelligentia prima est ut te nōris peccatorem* (“the beginning of knowledge is to know oneself to be a sinner”; cf., Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, I, 474). Indeed, it is recorded that Ps 32 was Augustine’s favorite psalm, that he read it frequently, and that before he died, he had its words inscribed on the wall by his sickbed, to be both exercised and comforted by them (Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 161).

The psalm progresses smoothly from the statement of principle (vv 1–2) to the illustration of the principle (vv 3–5), and from the invitation to pray (v 6) to the admonition not to be stubborn (vv 9–10); it concludes on a mighty note of praise. It is a fundamental psalm, illustrating powerfully the prerequisite of spiritual health, namely a self-conscious awareness of one’s sinful life and of the necessity of acting upon that awareness in confession before God. And further, the psalm establishes (as St. Paul was later to write) that justification and forgiveness for mankind are not achieved on the basis of law, or of circumcision, but on the basis of the divine grace, which flowed in response to the faith of the one who confessed and sought forgiveness (Rom 4:6–9). The psalm is thus central to the gospel and points out the path of true happiness to sinners aware of their need for forgiveness.

cf. *confer*, compare

Craigie, P. C. 2002. Vol. 19: *Word Biblical Commentary : Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas