
Psalms 32 — The Blessedness of the Uncovered Heart — Forgiveness, the Body's Testimony, and the Confession That Sets a Soul Free

Psalm 32: a psalm of David, superscribed Maschil (instruction) — one of the seven traditional penitential psalms. From the misery of unconfessed sin to the release of honest confession and the joy of the forgiven, David teaches from inside his own repentance what it costs to keep silence and what it gives to come clean.

We have left the shepherd's fields and the battle songs and come to a psalm with a label on it. The superscription reads "A Psalm of David, Maschil" — and that second word is not decoration. *Maschil* (H7919, from the verb *sakal*, to be prudent, to make wise) marks this as a teaching psalm, a piece written to instruct. David is not merely praying here; he is handing us a lesson, and the lesson is drawn from the most expensive tuition a soul can pay. This is one of the seven psalms the Church has for centuries called the penitential psalms — the songs of repentance — and of that grieving family it may be the most useful, because it is the one that turns around at the end and teaches.

Hebrew Word Studies

***nasa* (H5375) (נָשָׂא) — to lift, bear, carry, take away — hence "forgiven" vv. 1, 5.** The KJV renders it "forgiven" in verse 1 and "forgavest" in verse 5, but the root picture is physical — to *lift* and *carry*. When a burden is *nasa'd*, someone stoops, takes the weight onto himself, and carries it off. It is the verb behind the scapegoat that "shall bear upon him all their iniquities" (Lev. 16:22), and behind the Suffering Servant who "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4) and "bare the sin of many" (Isa. 53:12). So David's "blessed is he whose transgression is *forgiven*" is not a legal abstraction; it is a weight lifted off one back and set onto Another's. This is why forgiveness *feels* like something — the sinner who has felt sin's real heaviness (v. 4, "thy hand was heavy upon me") knows the exact moment the load leaves. Alma described the same physics from the inside: "I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins... But... I could remember my pains no more; I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more" (Alma 36:17, 19). The weight was *nasa'd*. Blessedness, in Hebrew, is the lightness of a man who is no longer carrying what he cannot carry.

***chashab* (H2803) (חָשַׁב) — to think, reckon, account, impute, count v. 2.** "The man unto whom the LORD *imputeth* not iniquity." *Chashab* is a ledger word — to reckon, to enter into an account, to count something *as* something. It is the identical verb used of Abraham: his faith "was *counted* unto him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6), the verse Paul pairs with this psalm in Romans 4 to build the whole doctrine of justification. So verses 1–2 give us the two sides of one transaction: God does not *chashab* our sin against us (v. 2), and instead *chashabs* righteousness to us as a gift. The blessedness is entirely in whose hand holds the pen. A man can keep his own books meticulously — David tried, and it aged his bones — but the only ledger that finally matters is God's, and grace is God choosing what to write there. This is exactly the accounting King Benjamin pressed on his people: even at our best "ye are unprofitable servants" (Mosiiah 2:21), so that salvation can only ever be reckoned, never earned. The forgiven man has stopped auditing himself and let God do the books.

***chashah / charash* — "kept silence" (H2790) (חָשַׁח) — to be silent, be still, keep quiet — also to plow, to engrave v. 3.** "When I kept *silence*." The verb is haunting because its root also means to *plow* and to *engrave* — to cut deep, permanent furrows. David's silence was not restful stillness; it was the kind of silence that carves grooves into a man. What he would not speak got engraved into him instead — into his bones, his sleep, his moisture. Scripture treats concealment as the great multiplier of sin's damage: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13) — the exact two-road map of this psalm. The Doctrine and Covenants draws the same line: "by this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins — behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43). Silence toward God is the one place repentance cannot begin, because repentance is, at its root, a thing you *say*. David plowed a year of furrows into himself before he learned that the mouth clamped shut on sin is the mouth that cannot be healed.

***yadah* (H3034) (יָדָה) — to confess, to acknowledge — and, in another stem, to give thanks, to praise v. 5.** "I will *confess* my transgressions unto the LORD." Here is one of the most beautiful facts in the Hebrew Bible hiding in a single verb. *Yadah* means to confess sin — but the very same root, in its causative stem (*hodah*), is the ordinary word for giving *thanks* and *praise* ("O give *thanks* unto the LORD," Ps. 136:1, is this root). Confession and thanksgiving are one word, because they are one act: both are the soul telling the truth about God and about itself. To confess sin is to acknowledge, "You are right and I was wrong"; to give thanks is to acknowledge, "You are good and I am indebted." Hebrew refuses to separate them. This is why the psalm can travel from the groaning of verse 3 to the "shout for joy" of verse 11 without changing subjects —

confession is the doorway into praise. The mouth that finally says "I have sinned" is already halfway to saying "bless the LORD." David's cascade of speaking-verbs in this verse is the whole grammar of the return: the same tongue that hid the sin now names it, and the naming turns, almost at once, into song.

***kasah* — "hid" / "covered" (H3680) (כָּסָה) — to cover, conceal, hide, clothe v. 5 (and the thought of v. 1).** A quiet word-play threads the psalm. In verse 1 the blessed man's sin is "*covered*" — and though the KJV uses "hid" for a different verb in verse 5, the psalm's whole drama is a contest over who does the covering. *Kasah* means to cover, and the question of Psalm 32 is: will *you* cover your sin, or will *God*? Adam's instinct in Eden was to cover himself — fig leaves, then hiding among the trees (Gen. 3:7–8) — the reflex of every sinner since. David tried it for a year and it only aged him. The gospel reverses the hand that holds the covering: "Blessed is he... whose sin is *covered*" — covered not by the sinner's fig leaves but by the LORD, as the mercy seat's blood *covered* the ark. Proverbs states the law flatly: "He that *covereth* his sins shall not prosper" (Prov. 28:13) — self-covering fails — yet "love *covereth* all sins" (Prov. 10:12), and "charity shall *cover* the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8, echoing it). The sinner who stops covering himself is the one God covers. Uncover, to be covered — that is the exchange at the heart of the psalm.

***sakal* / *Maschil* (H7919) (שִׂכֵּל / מִשְׁכֵּל) — to be prudent, to have insight, to act wisely — hence "instruct," and the title *Maschil* superscription; v. 8.** The psalm is bracketed by this one root. Its title is *Maschil* — a "teaching" or "instruction" psalm — from *sakal*, to have insight and to impart it. And in verse 8 the LORD picks up the very same root: "I will *instruct* thee" (*sakal*) "and teach thee in the way." So the psalm's genre and the psalm's climax are the same word: this is instruction *about* instruction, a wise man teaching us to be teachable. And its opposite is named two verses on — the horse and mule "have no *understanding*" (*bin*, v. 9), the beast that cannot be *sakal*'d, that learns only through the bit. The whole psalm is a plea to be the kind of creature that can be taught by a word and a look rather than by a wound. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10); "if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James 1:5) — the verse that sent a boy into a grove to be taught. To be *maschil* is David's aim for us: not merely forgiven, but grown wise enough by the forgiving that we never again have to learn the same lesson from the heavy hand.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The Hebrew parallelism reinforces the movement at every step, and the three Selahs (vv. 4, 5, 7) function like held breaths at the psalm's three turning points — one at the bottom of the misery, one right after the forgiveness lands, one after the hiding-place is named. There is a genuine framing device, too: the psalm opens with two "Blessed" beatitudes over the forgiven (vv. 1–2) and closes with two imperatives of joy over the righteous — "Be glad... and rejoice... shout for joy" (v. 11). The blessedness announced at the start is commanded at the end; what verse 1 pronounces, verse 11 tells the forgiven to go and do. And the vocabulary of covering and hiding is threaded all the way through — sin covered (v. 1), iniquity not hid (v. 5), God as the hiding place (v. 7) — so that the reader watches a man stop hiding his sin and start hiding in his God. I will not force a chiasm on it; the artistry here is the honest V-shape of repentance itself, down into the truth and up into the joy, with the confession at the hinge.