

# Understanding Psalm 32

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A MASKIL OF DAVID.

- <sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*
- <sup>3</sup> *For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.*
- <sup>4</sup> *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> *I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and I did not cover my iniquity;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"  
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*
- <sup>6</sup> *Therefore let everyone who is godly  
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;  
surely in the rush of great waters,  
they shall not reach him.*
- <sup>7</sup> *You are a hiding place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah*
- <sup>8</sup> *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,  
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,  
or it will not stay near you.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Many are the sorrows of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! (ESV)*

Today we will explore Psalm 32 together and seek to understand more about God, ourselves and the Bible. We will do several exercises with the psalm printed below to this end.

1. To whom is the writing of this psalm attributed?

*David (see title)*

2. Many of our Bibles have headings every so often to help describe what is going on in the Bible. These headings are added by editors to make it easier to find our place in the Bible and to find those passages we may have in mind as we search the Scriptures.

Today you get to be the editor. Read through Psalm 32 on the front page and add the brief heading on the line the passage.

3. Discuss how the psalm is put together.
  - a. How many verses are there: **11**
  - b. How many stanzas (groupings)? **6** Draw a line between them.
  - c. Find the changes in mood or attitude **11**
  - d. Consider the difference between Hebrew and English poetry

*While English poetry often uses rhyme and meter, Hebrew poetry uses similes, parallelism and chiasmic structure; here it is Wisdom (1-2), Thanksgiving (3-5), Thanksgiving (7-8), Wisdom (9-10) and a conclusion (11)*

4. Discover and discuss what it means when the psalmist writes “blessed is...” in verse 1. Which Hebrew word is behind our word “bless,” either **‘eshet** (’āšar is the verb described below) or **barak**? *‘eshet also in Psalm 1 (barak is the word used in Psalm 67:1, 6, 7)*

There are two verbs in Hebrew meaning “to bless.” One is *bārak* and the other *’āšar*. Can any differences between them be tabulated? For one thing *bārak* is used by God when he “blesses” somebody. But there is no instance where *’āšar* is ever on God’s lips. When one “blesses” God the verb is *bārak*, never *’āšar*. One suggestion to explain this sharp distinction, i.e. that *’āšar* is reserved for man, is that *’āšar* is a word of envious desire, “to be envied with desire is the man who trusts in the Lord.” God is not man and therefore there are no grounds for aspiring to his state even in a wishful way. Similarly God does not envy man, never desires something man is or has, which he does not have, but would like to have. Therefore God never pronounces man “blessed” (*’ašrê*) (Janzen). It should also be pointed out that when *bārak* is used

the initiative comes from God. God can bestow his blessing even when man doesn't deserve it. On the other hand, to be blessed ('*ašrê*), man has to do something. Finally, *bārak* is a benediction, '*āšar* more of a congratulation. The former is rendered by *elogētos* in the LXX and the latter by *makarios*.<sup>1</sup>

5. What different words are used in this psalm to mean *sin*?

*Transgression, sin, iniquity, deceit, trouble*

**transgression** The term *pesha* describes an offense or wrongdoing (Gen 50:17; 1 Sam 25:27).

**sin** The term *chattah* refers to an offense toward God (Exod 32:30–34). It can be intentional (Lev 5:5) or unintentional (Num 15:28).

**iniquity** The term *awon*, meaning “guilt” (Exod 28:38; 1 Sam 20:1), can describe breaking God’s commands (Num 15:31). (*Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012). Ps 32:1–2.)

6. What are some of the effects of unconfessed sin that David describes?

*Bones wasted away and groaning all day (3),*

*The Lord’s “hand” of conviction was working on him (4),*

*Strength or vitality was drained (4)*

7. When did things improve for David... what brought the change?

*David acknowledged and confessed his sin to the Lord; he no longer tried to cover it, but knew what it was clearly.*

8. What commands are presented in this psalm?

*Offer prayer (6), don’t be like a horse or mule (9), be glad (11), rejoice (11), shout for joy (11)*

9. Identify a key word, key phrase, or key sentence in each stanza of this psalm. (you may circle or mark it or write it below)

*“Blessed is the forgiven” (1)*

*“Day and night your hand was heavy upon me” (4)*

*“I acknowledged my sin to you... you forgave the iniquity” (5)*

*“You are a hiding place...” (7)*

*“I will instruct you... in the way you should go” (8)*

*“Be glad in the Lord” (11)*

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<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, "183 אָשַׁר", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999). 80.

10. What is the main interest of the writer at the opening of the psalm?  
*The blessings of being guilt free*
11. From the evidence you see in this psalm, how would you summarize what David knows about *sin* and *forgiveness*?  
*He had a personal experience of being riddled with guilt due to sin and then being forgiven. He knows that forgiveness comes from the Lord.*
12. Remember again the promise in 1 John 1:9—that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us and cleanse us from unrighteousness. What parts of this psalm can serve as a model and inspiration for the way you confess your personal sins?  
*Don't try to hide sin from God, confess it!*
13. Look again at verses 8-9. In practical terms, how can you avoid what David speaks of in verse 9?  
*Don't be as dumb as a mule... learn to understand (distinguish between right and wrong). Read to know and understand God's Word.*
14. Which verse in this psalm do you think God would like you to understand the best?
15. Commit that verse to memory, to study, to reflect upon it this week.  
*Go the extra step and write them down for further reflection in this space.*