

**Notes on
the text of
Psalm 32**

prepared by Rev. Dr. R. D. Anderson
(last edited 28 September 2017)

Introduction

Psalm 32 is one of the 7 so-called penitential psalms. It is rather interesting, particularly in terms of its implied liturgy. Various different people are addressed at different moments, and various different people are brought on stage – as it were – to speak. Although such a psalm may have arisen as a private prayer of David, the psalms of the 5 books of the Psalter have been collected for the use of God's congregation, in the first place, in the temple. As such, they have generally been purged of anything too specific to the original author and they often have a distinct liturgical context. That is certainly the case with Psalm 32. It begins with a *blessing* (verses 1-2) spoken in general to God's people and is followed up by the prayer to God of an individual (verses 3-7), God's voice speaking to that person (verses 8-9), and closes with words from others directed to the assembled worshippers (verses 10-11). It is never easy to pinpoint the exact moment in the liturgy when such a psalm would have been sung, but it seems clear that a sacrifice has taken place and that the priestly blessing showing reconciliation to the worshippers has been given (see Lev. 9:22-23; Num. 6:22-27). Under the law of Moses, forgiveness for sin was granted on God's behalf by a priest after confession of sin over a sacrificial animal. A confession, such as mentioned in v.5, must have taken place in the sanctuary. We might imagine a liturgical context as follows:

- (1-2) Blessing sung by the Levitical choir.
- (3-7) A particular worshipper steps forward, raises his hands to God and prays.
- (8-9) A priest steps forward chanting in the name of God himself.
- (10-11) The Levitical choir sings, directing itself to the assembled worshippers.

The notes on the text are given after each verse has been presented in both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Text.....	4

Text

Superscription

לְדָוִד מִשְׁכִּיל

Τῷ Δαυίδ, συνέσεως.

‘A *maskil* of David’. A construct relation would not be possible here, for מִשְׁכִּיל דָּוִד would mean ‘the maskil of David’. The term ‘maskil’ is used as a title for a number of psalms. It is, of course, the hiphil participle (used as a substantive, *sc.* שִׁיר) of שָׁכַל hiph. ‘to understand’ (inwardly transitive¹), ‘to make wise / insightful’. It is quite possible that the psalm was given this title on the basis of what God states in v.8 (אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ ‘I will instruct you’).

V.1

אֲשֶׁר־י נְשׁוּי־פָשַׁע כְּסוּי הַטָּאָה:

Μακάριοι ὧν ἀφέθησαν αἱ ἀνομίαι καὶ ὧν ἐπεκαλύφθησαν αἱ ἀμαρτίαι,

אֲשֶׁר־י

The word is a plural construct and is here followed by a relative clause (the omission of אֲשֶׁר is poetic), see Joüon/Muraoka §129q.

נְשׁוּי־פָשַׁע

See Joüon/Muraoka §121o. This construction with the Qal passive is an abbreviation of אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נְשׁוּי אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נְשׁוּי מִמְּנוֹ פָשַׁע מִמְּנוֹ (‘a man whose rebellion is taken away’).

כְּסוּי הַטָּאָה

While we might have expected a Pual participle here, in fact the Pual is never used for the sense of ‘forgiven’. The Qal is only used 3x in total, here and twice in Proverbs for ‘to cover’. The phrase is an abbreviation for אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּסוּיָהּ הַטָּאָה מִמְּנוֹ (‘a man whose sin is covered / forgiven’).

It is interesting to note that the LXX treats the singular Hebrew nouns for sin and rebellion as collectives, translating them in the plural. The image of ‘covering’ for forgiveness is typically Hebrew and not Greek. In the NT we find it in Romans 4:7 (a quotation of this Psalm) and additionally in 1 Peter 4:8 and James 5:19-20 (both based on Prov. 10:12). In the OT we find the following verbs and images used for forgiveness:

סָלַח	to forgive
נָשָׂא	to lift up, carry away
מָחָה	to wipe clean
כָּפַר	to cover
הֵעֲבִיר	to cause/allow to pass
עָבַר עַל	to pass by
הִרְחִיק	to cause to be far away
לֹא נִזְכַּר	to not remember

In Greek a regular way of expressing forgiveness is with the use of συγγινώσκω:

συγγινώσκω τινὲ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν, to excuse / pardon someone for a sin

This expression is, however, not used in the NT and this fact is probably significant. God does not ‘excuse’ us our sins, but has them dealt with by signifying payment via sacrifice. The various NT authors have different terminological preferences when expressing forgiveness. The following summary may suffice:

1 I.e. ‘to make oneself wise’.

Gospels

ἀφίημι (send away) *as a legal term*

1. + acc. pers. et gen. rei, acquit someone of a charge
2. + dat. pers. et acc. rei, remit someone of a charge

Note that the term literally refers to ‘sending away’ / ‘dismissing’ and implies authority over the personal object in respect of the matter in hand. As such it is a general technical term for ‘dismissal’ whether of an army, a wife (i.e. divorce), or a legal charge. It can also be used in the sense of ‘to permit’, i.e. send away any objection. It is also used in the LXX.

Peter

ἐξαιλείφω

The refers literally to ‘plastering over / white-washing’ and is also used in the sense of ‘wipe out’. We find it in Acts 3:19 in the mouth of Peter: μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας. It is surely a Hebraism from קָיַן ‘to wipe clean’.

Paul

χαρίζομαι

Paul prefers the Jewish term χαρίζομαι. It should be noted, however, that Paul’s use of χαρίζομαι + acc. of a wrong + dat. of person (2 Cor. 12:13b; Col. 2:13; 3:13) does not strictly speaking equate to the sense ‘to forgive + direct object’. The verb is used in the sense ‘to gratify someone (τινι) with respect to something (acc. of respect)’. Compare Dionysius of Halicarnassus 5,4,3 φρονίμων μὲν ἀνθρώπων ἔργον ἐστὶ ταῖς φιλίας χαρίζεσθαι τὰς ἔχθρας, ἀνοήτων δὲ καὶ βαρβάρων τοῖς ἐχθροῖς συναναιρεῖν τοὺς φίλους (‘it is a work of wise men by means of friendships to gratify enmities and of both stupid men and barbarians by means of enemies to destroy friends’ – alternately ‘to destroy friends together with enemies’). Although the construction is therefore Greek, it is typically Jewish (but *not* LXX) to use it with respect to sin (see e.g. references in BDAG). Passages such as 2 Cor. 2:7, 10 and Eph. 4:32 must be taken in a more general sense and not narrowed down to a sense of ‘forgive’.

Paul occasionally uses other expressions for forgiveness:

ἀφίημι

Paul does not use the verb, however he does use ἄφεσις in the sense of forgiveness in Col. and Eph.

παρίημι, (to pass over / by)

This is only found as a Hebraism (עָבַר עָלַי) for forgiveness in Rom. 3:25 as the noun πάρεσις.

ἐπικαλύπτω

This is a Hebraism only used in Rom. 4:7 quoting Psalm 32.

ἀπολύω

Paul uses the cognate noun ἀπολύτρωσις ‘ransom payment’.

ἰλάσκομαι

Paul uses ἰλαστήριον ‘propitiation’.

V.2

אַשְׁרֵי אֲדָם לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּרוּחַ רְמִיָּה:

μακάριος ἀνήρ, οὗ οὐ μὴ λογίσῃται κύριος ἀμαρτίαν, οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ δόλος.

בְּשֵׁם לֹא דָם

In Hebrew poetry the relative pronoun is often omitted. We should understand: בְּשֵׁם לֹא דָם אֲשֶׁר. Of

course, if the relative pronoun had been used then the ensuing word-order would be יהוה לו instead of יהוה לו.

ברוחו

LXX seems to have read בְּפִימוּ (a poetic form) or בְּפִיהוּ.

V.3

כִּי־הִחַרְשֵׁתִי בְּלוּ עֲצָמַי בְּשֹׁאֲגֹתַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:

ὅτι ἐσίγησα, ἐπαλαιώθη τὰ ὀστά μου ἀπὸ τοῦ κράζειν με ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν,

עצמי

Reference to one's 'bones' is not infrequently metaphorical of a stirring of one's innards, reflecting particularly on emotions, cf. Jer. 20:9; 23:9; Ps. 38:4 (Eng. v.3).

בלו

There are Hebrew mss which read בְּלוּ 'to fade away / fail'.

V.4

כִּי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה תִכְבַּד עָלַי יָדְךָ נְהַפְךָ לְשִׁדְי בְּחַרְבְּנִי קִיץ סְלָה:

ὅτι ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς ἐβαρύνθη ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἡ χεὶρ σου, ἐστράφην εἰς ταλαιπωρίαν ἐν τῷ ἐμπαγῆναι ἄκανθαν. διάψαλμα.

נהפך לשדי

A לְשִׁדְי is a (fatty) 'cake' which seems unlikely here.² The LXX seems to have read: נְהַפְכֵתִי לְשִׁדְי or perhaps the LXX merely read and interpreted the infinitive with the prepositional phrase לְשִׁדְי נְהַפְכָה (ταλαιπωρία = 'hardship / distress' = שִׁדְי 'oppression'). An easier emendation lies to hand, however, in לְשִׁנִּי, which admittedly would normally be spelled לְשִׁוְנִי. The phrase 'my tongue is turned' could be interpreted in the sense of 'changed' or 'destroyed' (i.e. turned over and so overthrown or destroyed). But הִפְךָ, which in essence refers to turning something over, can also be used in the sense of 'to turn x into (ל or כּ or double acc.) y'. We may read here: 'My tongue is turned into the dry heat of summer'.

בְּחַרְבְּנִי

The noun חַרְבוֹן is a *hapax legomenon*, but the root makes the meaning quite clear 'dry heat'.

בְּחַרְבְּנִי קִיץ

The LXX seems to have read קִיץ ('thorny bush') for קִיץ ('summer'). The confusion between י and ו is quite common in mss. I'm not sure what verb the LXX read, but it seems to have read כּ+ infin. cstr. and a verb-form (e.g. Niph. or Hiph.) beginning the infin. cstr. with a ה (often confused with ח).

סְלָה

This term is obscure. The LXX seems to have interpreted it in the sense of a (plucked string) musical interlude (διαψάλλω would mean 'to play a stringed instrument through the pause'). As such, it seems to mark off certain sections.

V.5

חַטָּאתַי אֲדִיעֶךָ וְעֹנִי לֹא־כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרֹתַי אֲוִדָה עָלַי פִּשְׁעֵי לִיהוָה וְאַתָּה נִשְׂאָתָּ עֲוֹן חַטָּאתַי סְלָה:

τὴν ἁμαρτίαν μου ἐγνώρισα καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν μου οὐκ ἐκάλυψα, εἶπα Ἐξαγορεύσω κατ' ἐμοῦ τὴν ἀνομίαν μου τῷ κυρίῳ, καὶ σὺ ἀφῆκας τὴν ἀσέβειαν τῆς ἁμαρτίας μου. διάψαλμα.

אֲוִדָה עָלַי פִּשְׁעֵי

The form עָלַי is older than the spelling על. The LXX has, however, read the consonants as עָלַי,

2 Clines also gives the more traditional option of 'moisture', which is then interpreted metaphorically as 'vigour' for Ps. 32.

probably because יהי hiph. is nowhere else used with על. However, the hithpael (which is the more regular verbal form indicating ‘confession’) does take על (i.e. ‘make confession concerning ...’).

ועונו לא-כסיתי

Compare Prov. 28:13: מִכֶּסֶף פִּשְׁעָיו לֹא יִצְלִיחַ וּמוֹדָה וְעֹבֵב יִרְחָם:

V:6

על-זאת ותפלל כל-הקסיד אליך לעת מצא רק לשטף מים רבים אליו לא יגיעו:

ὑπὲρ ταύτης προσεύξεται πᾶς ὅσιος πρὸς σὲ ἐν καιρῷ εὐθέτω, πλὴν ἐν κατακλυσμῷ ὑδάτων πολλῶν πρὸς αὐτὸν οὐκ ἐγγισοῦσιν.

ותפלל

The verb may be interpreted as indicative or jussive (‘may he pray’).

לעת מצא

English translations often treat לעת מצא as an abbreviation of לעת באשר מצא (‘in a time in which one finds you’). Indeed we may suppose that the relative pronoun is omitted. Some interpreters have wanted to include רק in the sense ‘gaunt’ / ‘thin’: לעת אשר מצא רק ‘in a time which he finds himself gaunt’.³ Craigie suggests emending מצא רק to מצוק ‘hardship / anguish’.⁴ It is unclear whether the LXX read a different text, or just made the best of a difficult text in the translation. In considering the sense, we may compare three other texts:

Psalm 69:14 (Eng. v.13)

Isa. 49:8a

Isa. 55:6

ואני תפלתִי־לך יהנה עת רצון

כה אמר יהוה בעת רצון עניתִי וּבְזִמָּה יִשְׁעָה עֲזָרְתִּיךָ

דַּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהַמְצָאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיְתוֹ קְרוֹב:

V:7

אתה סתר לי מצר תצרני רני פלט תסוכבני סלה:

σύ μου εἶ καταφυγή ἀπὸ θλίψεως τῆς περιεχούσης με, τὸ ἀγαλλίαμά μου, λύτρωσαί με ἀπὸ τῶν κυκλωσάντων με. διάγγελμα.

תצרני

LXX seems to have read: צר לי צר (Qal part. from צור ‘to encircle’).

רני פלט

רני would have to be the construct plural of the otherwise unknown noun רן followed by a Piel infinitive construct with a sense such as ‘songs of liberation’. Now an infinitive construct as a verbal noun can be considered to be the genitive in a construct relationship (Joüon/Muraoka §124d). The LXX, however, has interpreted it as רנתי ‘my rejoicing’ and treated the infinitive separately understanding the following as מסוכבני.

3 See N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1–41* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972) 232n.

4 P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988).

V.8

אֲשַׁכִּילָךְ וְאוֹרְךָ בְּדַרְךָ־זוֹ תִלְךָ אֵינְעָצָה עָלַיְיָ עֵינַי:

συνετιῶ σε καὶ συμβιβῶ σε ἐν ὁδῷ ταύτη, ἧ πορεύσῃ, ἐπιστηριῶ ἐπὶ σὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου.

συνετιῶ

The verb συνετίζω ('to cause to understand') is a Septuagintal coinage based on the adjective συνετός. The correct cognate verb would have been συνίημι.

זו

This is an archaic relative pronoun (well attested in Ugaritic) predating אֲשֶׁר and not infrequently found in poetry. The LXX has understood בְּדַרְךָ־זוֹ with, or perhaps without, זו.

אֵינְעָצָה עָלַיְיָ עֵינַי

The verb עָצָה with עַל- should mean 'to advise concerning ...'. This would give: 'Let me advise (cohortative form) my eyes concerning you' (remember that the definite object marker is often omitted in poetry) or more probably 'Let me advise, my eyes are upon you'. It has been suggested that the LXX read: אֲנַצָּה 'I screw up (squint) my eyes upon you'. Closer to the Greek would be אֲנַצֵּב.

V.9

אֶל־תְּהִי־וֹ כָסוּס כְּפָרָד אֵין הָבִין בְּמַתְגַּוְרָסוֹן עֲדָיו לְבָלוֹם בַּל קָרַב אֶלַיְיָ:

μὴ γίνεσθε ὡς ἵππος καὶ ἡμίονος, οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν σύνεσις, ἐν χαλινῷ καὶ κημῷ τὰς σιαγόνας αὐτῶν ἄγξαι τῶν μὴ ἐγγιζόντων πρὸς σέ.

כְּפָרָד אֵין הָבִין

We need to understand the relative pronoun: אֵין הָבִין לֹ. כְּפָרָד אֲשֶׁר אֵין הָבִין. The LXX seem to have read אֵין הָבִין as בִּינָה.

עֲדָיו

Literally 'his jewellery', which is surely incorrect. Many emendations have been suggested, the simplest of which is עֲזָו 'his strength'. Where the LXX got 'their cheeks' from I'm not sure. In regular Hebrew that would be לְחֵיָהֶם.

לְבָלוֹם

The verb is a *hapax legomenon* meaning 'to restrain' (infin. cstr. with לָ). The meaning is not in doubt, given its use in the *Peshitta* and in Aramaic.⁵

בַּל

The word is poetic, meaning 'not'.

V.10

רַבִּים מְכַאוֹבִים לְרִשָּׁע וְהַבּוֹטֵחַ בִּיהוָה חֶסֶד יְסוֹבְבָנוּ:

πολλὰ αἰ μάστιγες τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ, τὸν δὲ ἐλπίζοντα ἐπὶ κύριον ἔλεος κυκλώσει.

וְהַבּוֹטֵחַ

The LXX correctly understands this as accusative. In prose we would read: וְאֶת־הַבּוֹטֵחַ.

5 See F. E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) 105.

V.11

:בלִּישׁוּרֵי־בָּבֶלְיָ וְהִנְנִי וְהַיְיָ יִגְדֵּל בְּיַהֲיִי וְהַיְיָ יִגְדֵּל בְּיַהֲיִי

εὐφράνθητε ἐπὶ κύριον καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, δίκαιοι, καὶ καυχᾶσθε, πάντες οἱ εὐθεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ.

ἀγαλλιᾶσθε

A wholly Jewish (and later Christian) verb, which together with ἀγαλλίασις seems to have originated from the Hellenistic verb ἀγάλλω.