

Psalms 51:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Analysis

Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. This verse intensifies David's plea for forgiveness, using two parallel couplets emphasizing thorough, complete cleansing. The imagery shifts from erasing a written record (v.1) to washing away defilement—sin as both legal debt and moral pollution requiring both pardon and purification.

"Wash me throughly" (כְּבָסֵן/kabeseni) uses kabes, meaning to wash by treading, beating, or scrubbing—the vigorous washing of dirty clothes. This isn't light rinsing but thorough, energetic cleansing to remove ingrained stains. The intensive form (harbeh—thoroughly, abundantly, repeatedly) emphasizes completeness: wash me again and again, thoroughly, until completely clean.

The image evokes laundry practices: soaking, beating, scrubbing, wringing—whatever necessary to remove stubborn stains. David recognizes sin's defilement penetrates deeply, staining the soul. Superficial cleansing won't suffice; he needs thorough, radical cleansing only God can provide.

"From mine iniquity" (מֵעֲוֹנִי/me'avoni) identifies what requires washing. Avon (iniquity) emphasizes sin's perverseness, crookedness, moral distortion. While pesha (v.1) stressed rebellion against authority, avon stresses corruption of character. Sin isn't merely external violation but internal perversion requiring transformation.

"And cleanse me" (וְטַהַרְנִי/vetahareni) uses *taher*, the term for ritual purification—removing ceremonial defilement that prevented worship and fellowship. Levitical law prescribed cleansing ceremonies for various impurities (Leviticus 11-15). David seeks not merely legal pardon but restored purity enabling renewed fellowship with God.

"From my sin" (מֵעַוְתָּה/mechattati) specifies what requires cleansing. *Chatta'ah* (sin) means missing the mark, falling short of God's standard. This is the most general term for sin—any failure to meet God's righteous requirements. Together, the three terms (*pesha*, *avon*, *chatta'ah*) cover sin's full scope: rebellion, perverseness, and failure.

The parallelism ('wash/cleanse,' 'iniquity/sin') emphasizes completeness through repetition. David doesn't merely ask once but multiplies his plea, emphasizing the thoroughness he seeks. This models persistent, urgent prayer for full forgiveness and restoration.

Historical Context

Levitical purification rites provide context for David's language. Sin offerings and guilt offerings addressed moral transgression, but purification offerings addressed ritual defilement (Leviticus 4-5, 11-15). Various impurities required ceremonial cleansing: contact with dead bodies, certain diseases, bodily discharges. Priests performed elaborate purification ceremonies involving water, blood, hyssop (v.7), and waiting periods.

Yet David knows no ceremonial ritual can cleanse his adultery and murder. These aren't ritual impurities but moral transgressions requiring divine forgiveness. He appeals beyond the Levitical system to God Himself. Later (v.16-17) he acknowledges God doesn't desire animal sacrifices but a broken and contrite heart. External rituals can't substitute for internal repentance and divine grace.

The New Testament develops this imagery. John declares, 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). Revelation 1:5 praises Christ who 'washed us from our sins in his own blood.' The cleansing David sought finds

fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice. His blood both pardons (legal forgiveness) and purifies (moral transformation), accomplishing what animal sacrifices couldn't.

Baptism symbolizes this cleansing. Paul writes, 'ye are washed...ye are sanctified...ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6:11). Ananias told Paul, 'arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord' (Acts 22:16). Baptism doesn't mechanically cleanse but symbolizes the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Throughout church history, believers have claimed this promise. Augustine prayed these words seeking deliverance from sexual sin. Luther found freedom from guilt by trusting Christ's cleansing rather than his own efforts. Countless converts from grievous sin testify: Christ washed them thoroughly, cleansing what seemed permanently stained. God's grace cleanses all sin—no stain too deep, no defilement too profound for His purifying power.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the image of 'washing thoroughly' (vigorous scrubbing) illustrate the depth and completeness of cleansing God provides?
2. What is the significance of using both 'wash' and 'cleanse,' and both 'iniquity' and 'sin'—how does this repetition emphasize completeness?
3. How does Christ's blood fulfill David's plea for thorough washing and cleansing from sin?
4. In what ways does baptism symbolize the spiritual cleansing David sought and believers receive through faith in Christ?

Interlinear Text

טְהִרֵנִי מִמְּפֹתָאת רַבָּה
me throughly Wash from mine iniquity me from my sin and cleanse
H7235 H3526 H5771 H2403 H2891

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 51:7 (Parallel theme): Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Revelation 1:5 (Sin): And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Jeremiah 4:14 (Parallel theme): O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

Ezekiel 36:25 (Parallel theme): Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

Isaiah 1:16 (Parallel theme): Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

Acts 22:16 (Sin): And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 6:11 (Parallel theme): And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 7:14 (Parallel theme): And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.