

Psalms 85:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

Analysis

Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. This verse celebrates God's past mercies as foundation for present petition. The perfect tense verbs indicate completed action—God HAS forgiven, HAS covered. The psalmist recounts history to ground current prayer in proven patterns of divine faithfulness. Nasa (נָשָׂא, "forgiven") literally means "to lift, carry away, bear"—God lifted the burden of iniquity from His people, removing sin's crushing weight.

"The iniquity of thy people" (avon amekha, אָוֹן עַמְּךָ) refers specifically to covenant community's sin. Avon (אָוֹן) denotes moral perversity, twisted behavior, guilt requiring punishment. This heavier term than mere chata (missing the mark) emphasizes deliberate rebellion against covenant obligations. Yet despite serious offense, God forgave—testimony to grace exceeding sin's magnitude.

"Thou hast covered all their sin" (kisita kol-chatam, כִּסֵּיתָ כָּל־חַטָּאתָם) uses sacrificial imagery. Kasah (כָּסָה, "covered") appears in Leviticus regarding atonement—the sacrificial blood covered sin, hiding it from God's righteous gaze. The definite "all" emphasizes completeness—not partial forgiveness but comprehensive coverage. No sin remained exposed to divine wrath. This anticipates Christ's atonement, which covers believers' sins completely (1 John 1:7).

Historical Context

This verse likely references Israel's return from Babylonian exile (538 BC), when God restored the nation despite their covenant violations that precipitated judgment. The exile resulted from persistent idolatry, social injustice, and rejection of prophetic warnings (2 Kings 17:7-23, 24:1-4). Yet God's covenant faithfulness outlasted their unfaithfulness—after 70 years, He brought them home. This demonstrates the principle articulated in Lamentations 3:22-23: God's mercies are new every morning; His faithfulness is great. The language of covering sin recalls the Day of Atonement liturgy (Leviticus 16), where the high priest made atonement to cover Israel's sins annually. The psalm celebrates that God enacted this covering for the nation corporately.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does remembering God's past forgiveness strengthen faith when seeking current mercy?
2. What is the difference between forgiveness (lifting away guilt) and covering (hiding sin from view), and how do both describe God's complete atonement?
3. How does this verse's emphasis on God forgiving 'thy people' (corporate Israel) relate to individual believers' assurance of forgiveness in Christ?

Interlinear Text

נָשָׂאתָ	עוֹן	עַם בְּךָ	כָּסִיתָ	כָּל	חַטֹּאתֵיהֶם
Thou hast forgiven	the iniquity	of thy people	thou hast covered	H3605	all their sin
H5375	H5771	H5971	H3680		H2403
:סְלֵה					
Selah					
H5542					

Additional Cross-References

Micah 7:18 (Sin): Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Colossians 2:13 (Sin): And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Psalms 32:1 (Sin): Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Numbers 14:19 (Sin): Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Acts 13:39 (Parallel theme): And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Jeremiah 50:20 (Sin): In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.

Psalms 78:38 (Sin): But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.

