

In *the* Shadow of His Wings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 19:4, 2 Samuel 11, 12, Pss. 17:8, 32:1, 36:7, 51:2, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7.*

Memory Text: “Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (*Psalms 63:7, NKJV*).

“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air” (*Prov. 30:18, 19, NKJV*).

The eagle is a live jet fighter. Armed with a hooked beak and razor's-edge talons, it is loaded like a jet fighter too. The eagle is wind and wing, bone, sinew, and blood. The eagle is scavenger, fisher, and thief. The eagle hurls itself from clouds toward water with the speed of a cyclonic storm. The eagle hobbles on balled-up claws in its nest to keep from dicing up its young. The eagle is majesty, power, and grace. The eagle is all these metaphors, yet greater than their sum. Small wonder, then, that the Bible writer failed to understand the fierce beauty of the eagle's flight.

David himself turned to a similar image in his psalms about being sheltered under the wings of God. This week we will meditate with David through his psalms on how God shelters us and covers our sin. But first we will look at the events that inspired his need for these coverings. Then we will seek to understand why we, too, need to be sheltered under those same wings.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.*

The Naked Truth

Eagles can soar to an altitude of 10,000 feet, higher than most birds. Like the eagle, David soared high. The shepherd-king reached heights of greatness few monarchs ever attain. He was clothed in the spoils of military victory and covered with honor and glory. But David forgot that his kingly robes were a gift from God. They could not hide a man's sins—even a king's—from God's sight.

David's garments, in a spiritual sense, were priestly as well as kingly; he was the head of Israel's theocracy too. The bitter sins that stained these garments inspired Psalms 32 and 51. To appreciate fully the imagery in these psalms as a covering for sin and the imagery in other psalms of God's wings as a divine covering, we need to look at how the narrative events of David's life inspired them. How ironic and tragic that in a study devoted to the spiritual lessons of garments, the sad story of David's fall begins in a literal lack of them.

At the pinnacle of greatness, David faces his fiercest battle. The war isn't waged on the bloody fields of Rabbah but over the six inches of mental turf that lies behind David's frontal lobe. Satan chooses his "weapon" well. What Goliath with his monstrous lance failed to do to David, a bathing woman, seen from the king's rooftop, does. Obviously, David forgets the lesson of his sling: how easily a "giant" is felled by one small stone or, in this case, one small glance.

One small stone and down falls a giant. One small glance and down falls a king. David did many things to "cover" his sin of adultery and avoid exposure. What were they? 2 Samuel 11. Why do our attempts to cover sin to avoid detection or punishment lead only to committing greater sins and to the threat of still greater exposure? How do the narrative details of David's story enforce this point?

One forbidden glance sets in motion events that end in murder and near civil war. David's story is of concealment after concealment to avoid consequences. The awful reality of sin is that committing one sin, without confessing and forsaking it, leads to committing another more heinous sin in order to hide the previous offense. David committed adultery and murder under the cloak of kingly power. But God's eye sees beneath the outer garments and lays bare the heart.

It has been said, "If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its ten thousands." With David's life in mind, what dangers does prosperity expose the soul to? Why does adversity often draw us closer to God? How can we avoid prosperity's pitfalls?

Nathan Bares All

For a whole year, David hides his sin under a veil of deceit. It looks as though the king has gotten away with murder. Sin hardens David's heart to stone. But God sends Nathan to break it.

Read Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–12 and its interpretation, keeping in mind that Jesus also resorted to parables. What are the advantages of using them? What was it about David's condition that made clothing the truth in a story a more effective, even necessary, way of reaching him?

Only a few verses long, Nathan's parable holds precious lessons for reaching the sin-hardened heart. First, Nathan does not come to David as an accuser; instead, he humbly and tactfully solicits David's help. David's heart may be hardened by sin, but his sense of justice is not completely deadened. Second, by clothing the truth in a parable, Nathan breaches David's defenses. Third, Nathan's method of presentation invites David to listen without feeling judged. The result? David condemns himself.

Nathan's verdict, "Thou art the man," rips through the veil of self-deceit in which David shrouded himself. David's response, "I have sinned against the Lord" is met with "the Lord also has put away your sin" (vs. 13, *NKJV*). Why was the Lord able to put away, or cover, David's sin? See 1 John 1:9.

David's sin is covered, but the child conceived in sin must die. For David, this tragedy must have been more bitter than his own death. He removes his kingly robes and puts on the garments of humility and mourning. He openly prostrates himself before God in repentance, pleading for his child's life. How ironic that, a year earlier, under the cover of darkness, David secretly prostrated himself in lust with Bathsheba on that fatal eve his dying child was conceived.

David reacts to the child's death in a manner that baffles his advisors. He rises. He bathes. He changes his clothes. He, the anointed of God, anoints himself anew and worships God. These actions demonstrate how those who have mourned for their sins must allow God to restore them: First, God raises the grieving sinner and bears him to Himself. Next, He washes away the guilt of our sin and clothes us in His righteousness. He anoints us with His Spirit so that we may worship Him.

David's fall into sin begins and ends with a bath. This final washing, however, is not a prelude to sin but a sign of a clean heart.

What hope do David's bathing, garment change, and anointing give us? Why can we who have been washed clean by Jesus have full assurance that we may come worship Him?

Blessed Is He Whose Sin Is Covered . . .

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (*Ps. 32:1*).

For a whole year after his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, David refuses to confess his sin, even to himself. But as Psalm 32 tells us, he suffers severe agony of mind and body as a result of his silence.

Read Psalm 32:3–5. In what ways does David use poetic imagery and symbolic language to describe what happens to him when he refuses to confess his sin? According to verse 5, what does David do to end his suffering?

With lies and bloodshed David covers his sin of adultery, but the weight of his own guilt crushes him. As Psalm 32 shows, though, David casts himself in true humility and repentance on the sure mercy of God. In his cry for forgiveness, David does a number of things that are instructive for all who seek God’s covering of forgiveness: (1) David makes no excuse for his sin; (2) he makes no attempt to justify himself; (3) he does not find fault with God’s law for condemning him; (4) he blames only himself for his sin; and (5) he genuinely hates the sin that separated him from God and turns from it. And God covers it.

David conceals his sin (*Ps. 32:3, 4*); **God** covers it (*vss. 1, 2*). What is the difference between our concealing and God’s covering? Before the righteousness of Christ can cover sin, what must be done to it?

God does not overlook sin. But sin is covered, meaning its guilt is no longer to be imputed, or brought against, the sinner when it is repented of. Confession alone is incomplete without repentance. We must not only be sorry for our sin, we must turn away from it in God’s power. God can forgive and cover all sin. His grace not only forgives sin but accepts the repentant sinner as though he or she never sinned! That is the power of Jesus, our Substitute, upon whom God lays the sin. In this way, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner.

How readily do you acknowledge before God your own sin and wrongdoing? If you do not, in the end, are you deceiving God or only yourself? Dwell on the implications of your answer.

Whiter Than Snow

Psalm 51, like Psalm 32, is a penitential psalm, written after David confesses his sin. Just as Psalm 32 alludes to garments in order to illuminate the concept of God's covering for sin, Psalm 51 also alludes to the imagery of garments as a sin covering. But here the emphasis is on the washing and whitening agents used to clean garments and on their spiritual significance. In other words, in this psalm, David metaphorically does his "dirty laundry."

In Psalm 51:2, David asks God to wash him thoroughly. What does this washing involve? How do the images of "purge me with hyssop" and "whiter than snow" (vs. 7) help us understand the nature of this cleansing?

The word that David uses here for washing is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the washing of a garment (*see Gen. 49:11, Exod. 19:10*). *Purge* suggests the idea of making atonement for sin. Hyssop, a gray-green marjoram plant, was used as a spice and had medicinal properties, thus it was both a nutritive and a healing agent. Hyssop, as David knew well, had a long history in Israel. It was used in the original Passover ritual (*Exod. 12:22*), in the day of cleansing a leper or a house (*Lev. 14:6, 49*), and in the offering of the red heifer for the purification of men and items unclean through contact with the dead. Moses used hyssop at the ratification of the covenant (*Heb. 9:19, 20*). See "Hyssop" in *The SDA Bible Dictionary*.

All these uses signify that hyssop was a powerful cleansing agent. David's use of hyssop shows he understood that only the remedy with the greatest purifying power could cleanse him from sin's defilement. And that remedy is the atoning blood of our Savior.

In Psalm 51:10, David prays for God to create in him a clean heart. What does having a "clean heart" mean?

God does not merely cleanse the heart from iniquity; He creates in His forgiven child a new heart. A new heart is a new mind. Paul exhorts us, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (*Rom. 12:2*) "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ" (*Titus 3:5, 6, NKJV*). Prayer for forgiveness always should be united with prayer for heart renewal and holy living. David desires to be clothed in an entirely new mental and moral nature. He prays to be steadfast in obedience and not to be deprived of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the Sanctuary of His Wings

“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (Ps. 61:4, NKJV).

Some eagles have wingspans of up to nine feet under which they can shelter and protect their hatchlings. God’s mercy, like the wings of the eagle, shelters those who forsake their sins, no matter how deep they may have fallen. But unlike the guilt of our sin, which is blotted out, the consequences or results of sin often may not be removed. David experienced the bitter reality of this truth, fourfold, in the deaths of three of his sons and in the rape of his daughter Tamar by her own half-brother, Amnon.

Sure, his sin had been forgiven, he could have peace in that sense. But in another sense, pain and suffering were to be his lot, all from a sin that had been forgiven.

May we all take heed!

What did David seek in the shadow of God’s wings? What do they offer us covering from? *Pss. 17:8, 36:7, 57:1.*

David probably composed Psalm 61 while in exile during the time Absalom usurped the throne. It declares trust in the covering mercy of God, possibly referring to the mercy seat in God’s sanctuary. Here rests the ark of God’s covenant with His people, with its covering cherubim, whose overarching wings shelter the law—the written transcript of God’s character of love. David may have been expressing a desire to dwell, through faith, with God in His sanctuary, his soul garbed in the transforming light of that love.

Perhaps, even now, though you’ve dedicated your life anew to God, you are suffering the consequences of sin: estrangement, exile, physical ailment, or emotional pain. What hope of healing does the shelter of God’s wings offer?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “David’s Sin and Repentance,” pp. 717–726, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Bible Biographies,” p. 157, in *Education*.

“David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. David did not in despair give over the struggle. In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance. . . .

“Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell. . . .

“Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will *abundantly* pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 725, 726, author’s emphasis.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the futility of coverings of our own devising compared with what Jesus willingly provides. What *does* He provide, and why is it the only covering for sin that can heal and save?
- ❷ Try writing one of your own psalms about God’s mercy and love. Like David, write it from your own personal experience. Bring it to class and share what you have written.
- ❸ Laundry detergent advertisements for bleaching agents promise to whiten and soften clothes. To bleach out a stain without softening it could be too harsh for fabric. To soften fabric without attending to the stain leaves it dirty. Why, then, do we need both the whitening power of God’s justice and the softening power of His mercy to cleanse the soul’s garment?
- ❹ Forgiven sin can make us miserable, but we mustn’t forget that it is *forgiven*. How can we learn that living with the consequences of our sin doesn’t mean that our sin hasn’t been forgiven?

Circle of Love

Georgi Kertikov was an unbeliever living in Bulgaria when he was called to repair some electrical appliances in a woman's home. She invited him to church, and he accepted, mostly because he didn't want to lose her as a customer.

In Sabbath School the class was discussing the beasts from Revelation 13. Georgi was interested in Chinese mythology and fighting sports, and this chapter of the Bible, with its dragons and beasts, really appealed to him. He decided that any church that talked about fighting, blood, and dragons must be pretty good. So, he continued attending and was baptized two years later.

Georgi married and was called to serve as a Global Mission pioneer in a small town in Bulgaria. Three small Bible study groups had formed in the town. The Bulgarian group had five members, the Turkish group had some interests but no members, and a Romani (Gypsy) group had seven or eight interests and no members. Georgi worked with all three groups for the next 18 months, and a number of the Romani people were baptized.

Georgi was asked to move to Chirpan, a city in southern Bulgaria that has a sizable population of Romani. The group there had been without a leader for several months, and a number of members had drifted away.

Georgi began visiting the members and encouraging them to visit those who had fallen away. Although he isn't Romani, Georgi has learned that Romani are highly communal people with strong family and clan ties. So, visiting members—and teaching members how to visit—is a high priority.

He used his carpentry and electrical skills to help make friends in the community. He made a device to help a paralyzed man move his legs and repaired a hole that a horse had kicked in a woman's door. As he works, he shares his faith.

Georgi focuses on social events to build community between believers and their families and friends who may not yet come to the church. He plans picnics, work bees, sporting events, and even computer classes to draw people together, to cement friendships and introduce people to Jesus. Before he could teach young people how to use computers, they had to learn to type. He assigned them to create a songbook of Turkish religious songs that they sing in church.

Georgi loves his work. He loves to make friends and share his love for Jesus. Currently, he is preparing 30 people for baptism and making many more friends in the community to whom he can introduce Jesus.

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GEORGI KERTIKOV *shares his faith in Chirpan, Bulgaria.*