

PSALM 38

Prayer of a Suffering Penitent

INTRODUCTION.

- A. A Psalm of David. To bring remembrance.
- B. Roy H. Enoch (5-11-94).
- C. "Prayer of a Suffering Penitent."
- D. This is the third of the Penitential Psalms, as we have already studied 6 and 32. The language is similar to that of the other Penitential Psalms which may indicate that the author used stylized language to describe himself.
- E. The Psalm begins (1,21,22) w/a plea to God for help and salvation.
- F. We will look at the psalm in three divisions:
 1. He describes his condition as a physical illness (1-11).
 2. He describes the opposition of his enemies (12-20).
 3. He concludes w/ a plea of faith that God will help (21,22).

THE TEXT.

- 38:1** O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath,
And chasten me not in Your burning anger.
- 2** For Your arrows have sunk deep into me,
And Your hand has pressed down on me.
- 3** There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation;
There is no health in my bones because of my sin.
- 4** For my iniquities are gone over my head;
As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.
- 5** My wounds grow foul *and* fester
Because of my folly.
- 6** I am bent over and greatly bowed down;
I go mourning all day long.
- 7** For my loins are filled with burning,
And there is no soundness in my flesh.
- 8** I am benumbed and badly crushed;
I groan because of the agitation of my heart.
- 9** Lord, all my desire is before You;
And my sighing is not hidden from You.
- 10** My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.
- 11** My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague;
And my kinsmen stand afar off.
- 12** Those who seek my life lay snares *for me*;
And those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction,
And they devise treachery all day long.
- 13** But I, like a deaf man, do not hear;
And *I am* like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
- 14** Yes, I am like a man who does not hear,
And in whose mouth are no arguments.
- 15** For I hope in You, O LORD;
You will answer, O Lord my God.
- 16** For I said, "May they not rejoice over me,
Who, when my foot slips, would magnify themselves against me."
- 17** For I am ready to fall,
And my sorrow is continually before me.
- 18** For I confess my iniquity;
I am full of anxiety because of my sin.
- 19** But my enemies are vigorous *and* strong,
And many are those who hate me wrongfully.

- 20 And those who repay evil for good,
They oppose me, because I follow what is good.
- 21 Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, do not be far from me!
- 22 Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

III. COMMENTS.

A. He describes his condition as a physical illness.

[v1] "O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath..." This begins like Psalm 6.

[v2] "For YOUR arrows pierce me deeply, and YOUR hand presses me down." David identifies his difficulties as God's punishment for his sin. He also describes his affliction as injuries or illness. Was it physical or mental and spiritual? (God's arrow-wounds are often used as a figure for divine judgment. See Deut. 32:42; Job 6:4; 16:12,13; Lam. 3:12,13.

[v2] "...Your hand presses me down." When aware of our sins, it is a feeling of pressure that God is constantly aware of our guilt.

[v3-10] Is described by most scholars as a literal physical disease. They then often argue that we do not know when David suffered like this, therefore, David probably did not write it. Some suggest that it was written by Jeremiah, but what great sin would he have been confessing? Does it seem like that to you? What disease or injuries would produce the physical descriptions given here? Notice the characteristics:

- "no soundness in my flesh" (because of Your anger)
- "nor health in my bones" (because of my sin)
- "my iniquities have gone over my head" (overwhelming)
- "like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me"
- "My wounds are foul and festering" (because of my foolishness)
- "I am troubled"
- "I bow down greatly"
- "I go in mourning all the day long" (depression?)
- "my loins are full of inflammation" (fever?)
- "there is no soundness (health) in my flesh"
- "I am feeble and severely broken"
- "I groan because of the turmoil of my heart" (not pain)
- "My heart pants, my strength fails me;"
- "the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me."

It seems to me that this describes mental anguish because of guilt rather than a physical illness. At other times David uses similar descriptions to describe anguish over sin.

[v11] "My loved ones...my friends...my relatives stand afar off." When one has difficulty, help seems to leave in proportion to our need. Coffman quotes some sources: "As Kinder observed, 'It is ironical that the more desperately a person needs the support of friends, and loved ones the less likely he is to receive it!' As Rawlinson put it, 'the stricken deer is deserted by the rest of the herd.'"

B. He describes the opposition of his enemies.

[v12] "Those also who seek my life..." is the language of a deadly enemy and appropriately describes sin.

[v13] "...like a deaf man...like a mute..." Yet in (8) he had said, "I groan because of the turmoil of my heart" and one scholar says that the Hebrew here means, "I have cried louder than the roaring of a lion." There would be a contradiction if it were describing a physical condition, but spiritual descriptions are often physically contradictory as shown by the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:18,21.

[v15-18] David says that his only hope and dependence is on the Lord and he will declare his iniquity or confess his sin.

[v19] His enemies “are vigorous...they are strong,” and they had mistreated him, because they “render evil for good...” (20).

[v20] “They are my adversaries, because I follow what is good.” It is natural for evil to oppose good, and no other reason is needed for opposition is needed.

C. He describes the opposition of his enemies.

He seems to express confidence as he concludes his prayerful plea.