

Psalm 38

Title: Supplication and Sorrow of a Suffering Sinner

Author and Date: David

Key Verses: Psalm 38:3-5, 18

Type: Penitential

Outline

- A. The sentence for sin (verses 1-3).
- B. The suffering for sin (verses 4-10).
- C. The separation of sin (verses 11-16).
- D. The sorrow for sin (verses 17-20).
- E. The salvation from sin (verses 21-22).

Notes

Title: “A Psalm of David, to bring remembrance.” This title is also found in Psalm 70.

Summary: Psalm 38 pictures a man crushed by the weight of his enemies and his own sins. It is one of seven penitential psalms: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. Penitential psalms deal with sin, suffering, confession, and forgiveness. The occasion for this psalm may have been David’s sin against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 11-12), or a sin committed during the time of Absalom’s revolt. In Psalm 38, the psalmist is suffering physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. He believes he is chastened by his Lord (verses 1-3), pained by his body and mind (verses 4-10), forsaken by his friends (verse 11), and persecuted by his foes (verses 12, 16, and 19-20). He complains because of the suffering brought on by his sins (the inward cause) and by his enemies (the outward cause). He offers up three intense laments or complaints: verses 2-8, verses 10-14, and verses 16-20. In all this, the psalmist still has confidence that the Lord will answer his prayer and save him (verses 1, 9, 15, and 21-22) because he is willing to confess his sin and repent (verse 18).

Verse 1: This psalm opens and closes with a fervent prayer: “O Jehovah” (verse 1 and 21). Compare the words of verse 1 with Psalm 6:1, another penitential psalm.

Verse 3: The psalmist is willing to own up to his own sin, admit it, and confess it openly: “my sin” (verse 3 and 18), “mine iniquities” (verse 4), and “my foolishness” (verse 5). This is something that many will not do today.

Verse 5: Note that sinful behavior (verses 3-4) is “foolishness” (verse 5).

Verse 8: “Groaned” is from the Hebrew word for “roared” (KJV). This is strong emotional pain. Sin causes physical pain (verses 3-8) and emotional pain: “disquietness of my heart”. There can be psychosomatic effects to one’s sinful actions.

Verse 9: The psalmist stops for a moment to restate his confidence in God (see also verse 15 and 21-22).

Verse 11: The suffering psalmist felt about his friends as Job did about his (Job 19:13-19).

Verses 13-14: The psalmist was patient and did not listen to the threats (verse 12) nor did he retaliate (see 2 Sam. 16:9-14). He simply hoped in the Lord (verse 15).

Verses 21-22: Note that the psalmist uses the three popular OT descriptions of deity in these verses: “O Jehovah” (*yahweh* = eternal one), “O God” (*elohim* = mighty one), and “O Lord” (*adonai* = lord, master). See also verse 15.

Questions

1. What does the psalmist not want the Lord to do to him (verse 1)?
2. How does the psalmist describe the Lord’s indignation against his sin (verses 2-3)?
3. How does the psalmist describe his own iniquity and its consequence (verses 4-5)?
4. How does the psalmist describe the suffering from his sin (verses 6-10)?
5. What does the psalmist say concerning his groaning and the Lord (verse 9)?
6. What do the psalmist’s acquaintances do to him (verse 11)?
7. What do the psalmist’s enemies do to him (verse 12)?

8. How does the psalmist react to the threats of his enemies (verses 13-14)?
9. What does the psalmist believe the Lord will do for him (verse 15)?
10. What do the psalmist's enemies do when he falls (verse 16)?
11. What attitude does the psalmist have toward his sin (verses 17-18)?
12. How does the psalmist describe his enemies and why do they act the way they do toward him (verses 19-20)?
13. What final prayer does the psalmist have for the Lord regarding his suffering and sin (verses 21-22)?

Applications for Today

1. The Lord feels wrath, hot displeasure and indignation toward our sin (verses 1-3). What will happen to unrepentant and un-forgiven sinners in the judgment day (Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9)? How can one be saved from God's coming wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9)?
2. Sin brings tragic consequences and can cause physical and emotional pain. Sometimes our suffering is caused by our own sin (verses 3-10). What does Proverbs 13:15 say about the transgressor? What comes with sin according to Romans 1:27 and 6:23?
3. Sinful behavior is foolish behavior (verse 5). How is Saul's sin described in 1 Samuel 13:13 and how is Ammon's sin described in 2 Samuel 13:12-13?

4. When we are suffering we can tell who our real friends are (verses 11-12). What did the disciples do on the night of Jesus' betrayal (Mk. 14:50, 52)? What happened to Paul when he was on trial (2 Tim. 4:10, 16)?
5. When we are persecuted we must not retaliate, but hope in God (verses 13-14). How did Jesus respond to his persecutors (Mt. 27:39-44; Ac. 8:32; 1 Pet. 2:21-23)?
6. Genuine sorrow for sin leads to repentance and confession of sin (verse 18). What did the psalmist say he did in Psalm 32:5? What kind of sorrow did the Corinthians have toward their sin and what did it cause them to do (2 Cor. 7:9-11)? What does James counsel regarding one's sin (Jas. 4:8-10; 5:16)?
7. The Lord will not forsake his own in their sin. He will save his own (verses 21-22). But, sinful Christians must pray "the sinner's prayer" found in Psalm 38 (not the one suggested in the denominational world). What must sinful Christians do to be forgiven (Acts 8:22-24; 1 Jn. 1:9)?
8. Psalm 38 answers the question: "What happens to me when I sin?"

What God does to me when I sin (verses 1-3): rebuke, wrath, chasten, hot displeasure, arrows, hand presses sore, and indignation.

What sin does to me when I sin (verses 4-10): heavy burden, wounds, pained, mourning, burning, faint, bruised, groaning, disquietness, heart throbs, and strength fails.

What others do to me when I sin (verses 11-16, 19-20): stand afar off, lay snares, speak mischievous things, rejoice over me, hate me wrongfully, and render evil for good.

What I must do when I sin (verses 17-18, 21-22): declare my iniquity, be sorry for my sin, and pray for my salvation (verses 21-22).