



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 38

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm in Hebrew is *A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance*
- In Septuagint, the title is, *A Psalm of David, for a remembrance concerning the Sabbath*
- Actually, there is no mention of the Sabbath in it neither a thanksgiving; it is deeply repentance Psalm
- This is the third of the 'Repentance Psalms,' along with Psalms 6, 32, 51, 102, 130, and 143
- Some think that this Psalm is written in figurative language to represent trouble heavily pressing upon David as if he was sick



Introduction

- Others think it is intended to refer, not to David, but to the people of Israel as afflicted and persecuted
- In general, many say it refers to some severe affliction which David had after he sinned with Bath-sheba
- Whatever it was, he deeply repents for it, asks forgiveness, and earnestly beseeches support from God
- It is a song full of pain and sadness with guilt, as David felt the painful effects, both physical and spiritual, of his sin
- He is quite aware of two things: the evil of his own sin, and God's great displeasure of it



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8
- The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14
- Pleadings for Deliverance 38:15-22

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- These words almost are identical with Psalm 6:1
- Under a sense of God's deep displeasure, David cried out to God
- Even though he sensed both God's *wrath and displeasure*, he tried to draw near to Him
- The repentant David prays to God not to punish him in His anger and His wrath, as a Judge but in His mercy, as a loving Father
- He does not reject God's rebuke but asks for His mercy
- David can bear the anger of others, but he cannot bear God's displeasure
- God's '*arrows*' are His judgements in general as we read in Psalm 7:12; Deuteronomy 32:23

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- But *arrows* here in particular are pain and sickness as we read in Job 6:4, 16:12-13; Lamentations 3:12-13
- David used poetic pictures to describe how deeply he sensed the displeasure of God
- He was afflicted “as if” God had wounded him with *arrows - arrows* which pierced deep in his flesh
- Perhaps, by those “arrows” he also had in view those fearful rebukes he got from the prophet Nathan, 2 Samuel 12
- *Your hand presses me down*, Some supposed this to be some bodily disease inflicted on him

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- The psalmist begins with a description of his bodily troubles
- He declares that *there is no soundness in my flesh*
- No health, no feeling of life or energy, no vital strength
- *Nor any health in my bones*, His bones ache continually, and give him no rest
- Inner trouble can have its effect on the body, makes it deteriorate
- David recognized the hand of God in his misery, but he did not think it was without cause
- He knew that it was *because of his sin*, his *iniquities*, and his foolishness

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- David was miserable, but not a victim in the commonly understood sense – because his sins were the cause of the crisis
- *have gone over my head*, He admits that his sins are so numerous and so great, so he is overwhelmed by them
- *Like heavy burden they are too heavy for me*, David felt oppressed under the weight of his sins
- The sins one commits have an effect in the soul and in the body
- It is foolish to forsake the way of righteousness and allow sin to get the dominion over him
- He hoped that an honest and heartfelt confession of his misery would move God's compassion

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- The pain of David's sin affected him in almost every way
- He was bent, or *bowed down*, he struggled and twisted in pain as the result of his iniquities
- *bowed down*, To be brought low; to be depressed with pain, grief, and sorrow
- On account of sin, he was crushed and bowed down as a mourner is with his sorrows, and that he appeared constantly walking with these signs of grief and heavy sorrow
- Because of his shame, he did not dare to look up to heaven, and, thus humble, he is forced to look upon the ground, and for all these reasons he *go mourning all the day long*

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- The psalmist probably proclaims that man's haughtiness leads him to sin, that humiliates him in his depths, and bends his soul down to dust
- God allows for rebuke and discipline to reveal to him the humiliation caused by sin, and to make him return to his Savior and lifts his head in the Lord
- *For my loins*, Some suggested that this might refer to a problem with the kidneys
- His disease was so deep-rooted that there did not seem to be "any" *soundness in his flesh*
- His whole body seemed to be diseased

Description of his Physical and Mental Sufferings 38:1-8



- Now, having discovered the outcomes of sin, destroying his soul and body, that may even deny him the enjoyment of the eternal glory, his groans turned into cry-outs of true repentance coming out of his heart
- *I am feeble and severely broken*, Both in body, being weakened by the affliction, and in soul, being weak in faith
- David was known as the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Samuel 23:1)
- Yet with great honesty, he could also *groan* before God and men, composing a bitter psalm describing his misery in terms very strong

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- Having said that the groanings of his heart caused him to roar; he now tells us to whom those groans were directed
- To Him who “searches the heart,” and knows “what the spirit desires
- This has been called the first indication of hope in this Psalm
- The psalmist has laid "all his desire" before God and feels that He is considering it
- This is the expression of one who felt that his only hope was in God
- *And my sighing* He expressed freely all his complaint

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- St. Augustine says, “For it is not before men who cannot see the heart, but it is before You that all my desire is open! Let your desire be before Him; and “the Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you.”
- He knows that God was not forever angry with him, but might, by repentance and confession be reconciled and become his Defense and his Salvation
- His heart was disturbed trembling and filled with troubles
- *My strength fails me*, It is rapidly failing
- He regarded himself as rapidly approaching death
- David felt so low that life and *light* were leaving him

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- Having described the internal war, that is constantly going on within him, he now speaks of the external war, the persecutions and sufferings that are consequent of sin
- He first complains of his *friends* and *loved ones* rising up against him
- The psalmist feels himself to be *rebuked* and *chastened* by God
- He looks for comfort and sympathy to his friends, but they hold *aloof*, draw away and desert him
- His *loved ones and friends* turned into enemies, *stood aloof* from him, with no feelings of friendship nor love; assuming that God is against him

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- This might be related to Absalom's rebellion; in which he was joined by a great number of David's friends and relatives
- Those, such as Absalom and his companions, pressed in upon him to put him to death; his own servants and soldiers did not protect him and *stand aloof from* him
- So, David's misery was unrelieved by either *friends* or *relatives*
- His *loved ones* either did not care or could not help David
- David endured worse than the lack of support from friends and relatives
- He also faced determined enemies who constantly plotted his *destruction*

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- The prophet David complains from the malice of his enemies, who, used the chance of his illness and troubles, to seek his soul, to destroy his life completely; using lies and slanders
- What David suffered from his own people was a shadow of what the Lord Christ Himself suffered
- His own came against Him; and His disciples escaped at the moments of His crucifixion
- *lay snares for me*, As Satan does for the souls of men, as the Jews did for Christ, and as wicked men do for the saints

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- David was so depressed and afflicted that he felt powerless to respond to these attacks
- His inability to defend himself meant that he needed God more than ever
- All these are true as may be seen in 2 Samuel 16, when Shimei railed at David, called him *bloodthirsty man*, the invader of the kingdom, he bore it with the most incredible patience, and would not allow one of his followers to harm or even reprove him; and thus, it was literally true of him that *like a deaf man, do not hear; And I am like a mute who does not open his mouth*

The Forsaking of Friends and the Threats of Enemies 38:9-14



- David was like a man who is unable to answer, to warn, or rebuke an adversary
- The feeling in verse 13 is repeated here to show the greatness of his patience and self-restraint
- Again, this was a type of Christ, *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth”* (Isaiah 53:7)
- Also Matthew 26:63,27:14; 1 Peter 2:23

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- He acted in patience, because his hope was in God
- He committed his whole problem to God
- David chose to allow his affliction to press him toward God instead of away from the God who was his only hope
- He believed that God would take care of his reputation, and that He would defend and forgive him
- David appealed to God not only because he was disheartened, but also because he did not want his adversaries to rejoice over him
- He is praying to Him, not to let his enemies exult over his fall, magnify themselves over him with hurtful words, and mockery when his *foot slips*

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- David felt that his strength was almost gone, and that he was in continual danger of falling into sin, or sinking under his accumulated burdens
- He was ready to give up in despair; he was so depressed in spirit
- Men often have this feeling that their sorrows are so great that they cannot hope to stand firm much longer, and that if God does not step in, they must fall
- The fact that he was a sinner was never absent from his mind
- That was the source of all his trouble; that was what so pressed upon him that it was likely to crush him to the dust

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- The psalmist raised his prayer and supplications to God, not to relieve him of his tribulation, but to forgive his sins
- He was so willing to reveal his sin
- He would make no coverup of the fact that he regarded himself as a sinner
- He admitted this to be true, and he admitted that his sin was the cause of all his troubles
- It was the fact that he was a sinner that so painfully affected his mind; and he was not willing to attempt to conceal it from anyone
- The devastation brought upon David for his sin had brought him to true repentance

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- Having explained the reasons why he thought proper to remain silent and deaf before his enemies, he contrasts that patience with the malice of his enemies
- He did not return evil for evil; they, on the contrary, returned evil for good; and yet they enjoyed life, they exulted and were strengthened
- While he was weak and apparently near to death, they were in the full strength and health
- They could take advantage of his weakness; and he could not resist them, for he was no match for them
- In every respect they had the advantage of him; and he prays, therefore, for the divine intervention on his behalf

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- David tried to move God to deal more mercifully with him
- His enemies have increased in number
- David appealed to God for help because they were against him for no good reason
- The “underlying reason” of what they did was that he followed *good*, or that he was a righteous man
- We may be very humble before God and acknowledge that we deserve all that He brings upon us
- And yet, at the same time, we may be aware that we have done no wrong to men, and that their conduct toward us is wholly undeserved

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- The psalm closes only with a heartfelt cry
- More than anything, David wanted the sense of God's presence
- David seems to have been under divine abandonment, and has anxiety that God had completely forsaken him
- But he pleads He would not, though his friends had forsaken him, and his own strength had failed and left him
- His case required *haste*, and God does help His people when none else can
- David pressed his need before God with urgency and looked to the Lord as his only *salvation*
- His prayer was a prayer of faith

Pleadings for Deliverance

38:15-22



- He saw that his salvation was in the Lord, and in no other; and though he had been and was in such a low condition, both in soul and body, yet his faith was not lost
- It is obvious that the psalmist was not in despair, or else, he would not use the last verse in this psalm, which is the highpoint of his whole prayer
- The effect, therefore, of the trials that came upon the psalmist was to lead him to cry most earnestly to God
- Those sorrows led him to God
- Trouble never accomplishes its proper effect unless it leads us to God; and anything that “will” lead us to Him is a gain in the end



Discussion

- What is a Psalm of lament? What is a penitential Psalm? Why are penitential Psalms also Psalms of lament (as a subcategory)? How are these types of Psalms helpful to the people of God?
- What is the psalmist's external and internal condition? From whom does the psalmist expect relief?
- The psalmist surely associates his sickness with his sin why?



Discussion

- What is David's response to the slander and attacks of his enemies?
- The Lord disciplines those He loves. Discuss.
- How could David be so bold to appeal to God for mercy and for salvation, being the guilty sinner that he was?
- Do we feel genuine sorrow for our sin like that expressed in this Psalm? How does this Psalm give us a pattern for godly sorrow?