



OVERVIEW

Author: King David
(c. 1040-970 BC)

Outline:

Opening petition for God to rebuke David in mercy (v. 1–2)

An overview of David's sorry condition (v. 3–5)

The details of David's condition (v. 6–14)

David's hope in the Lord (v. 15–16)

David repents in front of his enemies (v. 17–20)

A final prayer for mercy (v. 21–22)

St. Augustine on Psalm 38:

"[When a man's soul has a sound sense of smelling], he perceives how foully sins stink. The contrary to which stink of sin, is that savour of which the Apostle says, "We are the sweet savour of Christ unto God, in every place, unto them which be saved,"" (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII:70).

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Around the Word BIBLE STUDY

Lententide, 2015

The Penitential Psalms Psalm 38

PSALM 38

A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

¹O LORD, rebuke me not in your | anger,*
nor discipline me | in your wrath!

²**For your arrows have sunk | into me,*
and your hand has come | down on me.**

³There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indig- | nation;*
there is no health in my bones
because | of my sin.

⁴**For my iniquities have gone o- | ver my
head;***
**like a heavy burden, they are too heav- | y
for me.**

⁵My wounds stink and | fester*
because of my | foolishness,

⁶**I am utterly bowed down and | prostrate;***
all the day I go about | mourning.

⁷For my sides are filled with | burning,*
and there is no soundness | in my flesh.

⁸**I am feeble | and crushed;***
I groan because of the tumult | of my heart.

⁹O Lord, all my longing is be- | fore you;*
my sighing is not hid- | den from you.

¹⁰**My heart throbs; my strength | fails me,*
and the light of my eyes—it also has- |
gone from me.**

¹¹My friends and companions stand aloof | from
my plague,*
and my nearest kin stand | far off.

¹²**Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of | ruin*
and meditate treachery | all day long.**

¹³But I am like a deaf man; I | do not hear,*
like a mute man who does not o- | pen his
mouth.

¹⁴**I have become like a man who | does not
hear,*
and in whose mouth are | no rebukes.**

¹⁵But for you, O LORD, | do I wait;*
it is you, O Lord my God, who will | answer.

¹⁶**For I said, "Only let them not rejoice | over
me,*
who boast against me when my | foot
slips!"**

¹⁷For I am read- | y to fall,*
and my pain is ever be- | fore me.

¹⁸**I confess my in- | iquity;***
I am sorry | for my sin.

¹⁹But my foes are vigorous, they are | mighty,*
and many are those who hate me | wrongfully.

²⁰**Those who render me e- | vil for good*
accuse me because I follow | after good.**

²¹Do not forsake me, | O LORD!*
O my God, be not | far from me!

²²**Make haste to | help me,*
O Lord, my sal- | vation!**

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

The Big Picture

This Psalm is the third of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Martin Luther says of this Psalm, "This psalm portrays most clearly the manner, words, acts, thoughts, and gestures of a truly penitent heart." (AE 14:156)

One of the first questions we ask of the Psalms is, "Who is talking to whom?" Is this Psalm a prayer, me talking to God? Is it a sermon, one Christian talking to another? Is it God talking to us? (Many times the Psalms will change who is talking to whom.) Scan the Psalm again. Who is talking to whom?

The second question we ask of the Psalms is, "What's the picture?" What is the picture that David paints in this Psalm? (Consider especially v. 2, 5, 12)

Repentance has two parts, contrition over sin and faith in the Lord's mercy. Where do you see contrition in this Psalm? Why isn't it enough to be sorry over sin? See Matthew 27:3-5. What did Judas lack?

Where in this Psalm do you see faith?

v. 1-2: Rebuke without Wrath

This verse is identical to Psalm 6:1. David asks that the Lord not rebuke him in anger and that the Lord's discipline would be an act of love and not anger. What's the difference, and how do we know that God will not rebuke the penitent in anger? See Colossians 2:13-14.

Consider Hebrews 12:3-17 (especially v. 7-11). Whom does the Lord chasten? Why?

v. 3-5: An Overview of David's Condition

How are things with David? How is his condition described in these verses?

Underline the three occurrence of "because" in these verses. What does David say is the cause of all his trouble?

v. 6-8: "I am..."

David shifts his prayer as he further describes his condition. "I am," he says. What more do we learn about his trouble in these verses?

There is a change in verse 8. The previous verses were mostly about David's body. Where does this verse locate his turmoil?

v. 9-10: David's Directs His Troubles to the Lord

David is not suffering alone; His troubles are directed toward the Lord. How does David describe his longing (desire)?

We often think of our desires as sinful, but there are godly desires. What do the Scriptures teach us to desire? (Consider Psalm 73:25, 107:9, 119:20.)

v. 11-12: David's Isolation

David's troubles have resulted in his friends leaving him and his enemies drawing close to him. What does this remind you of in the passion of Jesus? See Matthew 26:47-56.

v. 13-16: David is Deaf, but God is Not

David is like a deaf and mute man, but the Lord hears his prayers and answers him. Who is David waiting for? Compare also Psalm 130.

Waiting is a major theme in the Bible. It does not mean sitting around doing nothing. It means trusting, longing, hoping and believing. What does Psalm 40:1 say about waiting?

Consider Isaiah 40:27-31. What does this teach us about waiting?

v. 17-20: A Confession in front of His Enemies

Find David's confession of sin in these verses. What does David



say he will do with his iniquity and sin? What can we learn from this about confessing our own sins?

The Psalms assume that we have enemies. According to Ephesians 6:12, what enemy does every Christian have?

v. 21-22: A Final Plea

For what three things does David pray in these last verses?

What names does David use for God?

How does the prayer on v. 21-22 connect to the prayer of v. 1-2?

A Prayer for Mercy

All through this Psalm we see the destruction that sin has caused. What are some of the effects of sin seen in the Psalm?

King David is our example to us. How does he respond to sin (v. 1-2, 9-10, 15, 18, 21-22)?

Closing Hymn: From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee

1. From depths of woe I cry to Thee,
Lord, hear me, I implore Thee.
Bend down Thy gracious ear to me,
My prayer let come before Thee.
If Thou rememberest each misdeed,
If each should have its rightful meed,
Who may abide Thy presence?

5. Though great our sins and sore our woes,
His grace much more aboundeth;
His helping love no limit knows,
Our utmost need it soundeth.
Our shepherd good and true is He,
Who will at last His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.

(Martin Luther, 1524. TLH 329:1,5)

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