
A Psalm by David, for a memorial.

PSALM 38: 1 LORD, don't rebuke me in your wrath, neither chasten me in your hot displeasure.

David prays God to have mercy upon him, and gives a most affecting account of his miserable state, Psa 38:1-10; complains of his being forsaken by his friends, and cruelly persecuted by his enemies, Psa 38:11-16; confesses his sin; and earnestly implores help, Psa 38:17-22.

The title in the Hebrew states this to be A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance. The Chaldee; "A Psalm of David for a good memorial to Israel." The Vulgate, Septuagint, and Aethiopic: "A Psalm of David, for a commemoration concerning the Sabbath." The Arabic: "A Psalm in which mention is made of the Sabbath; besides, it is a thanksgiving and a prophecy." Never was a title more misplaced or less expressive of the contents. There is no mention of the Sabbath in it; there is no thanksgiving in it, for it is deeply penitential; and I do not see that it contains any prophecy. The Syriac: "A psalm of David, when they said to the Philistine king, Achish, This is David, who killed Goliath; we will not have him to go with us against Saul. Besides, it is a form of confession for us." It does not appear that, out of all the titles, we can gather the true intent of the Psalm.

Several conjectures have been made relative to the occasion on which this Psalm was composed; and the most likely is, that it was in reference to some severe affliction which David had after his illicit commerce with Bath-sheba; but of what nature we are left to conjecture from the third, fifth, and seventh verses. Whatever it was, he deeply repents for it, asks pardon, and earnestly entreats support from God.

Verse 1

O Lord, rebuke me not - He was sensible that he was suffering under the displeasure of God; and he prays that the chastisement may be in mercy, and not in judgment.

PSALM 38: 2 For your arrows have pierced me, your hand presses hard on me.

Verse 2

Thine arrows stick fast in me - This no doubt, refers to the acute pains which he endured; each appearing to his feeling as if an arrow were shot into his body.

PSALM 38: 3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation, neither is there any health in my bones because of my sin.

Verse 3

No soundness in my flesh - This seems to refer to some disorder which so affected the muscles as to produce sores and ulcers; and so affected his bones as to leave him no peace nor rest. In short, he

was completely and thoroughly diseased; and all this he attributes to his sin, either as being its natural consequence, or as being inflicted by the Lord as a punishment on its account.

PSALM 38: 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head. As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

Verse 4

Mine iniquities are gone over mine head - He represents himself as one sinking in deep waters, or as one oppressed by a burden to which his strength was unequal.

PSALM 38: 5 My wounds are loathsome and corrupt, because of my foolishness.

Verse 5

My wounds stink and are corrupt - Taking this in connection with the rest of the Psalm, I do not see that we can understand the word in any figurative or metaphorical way. I believe they refer to some disease with which he was at this time afflicted; but whether the leprosy, the small pox, or some other disorder that had attacked the whole system, and showed its virulence on different parts of the outer surface, cannot be absolutely determined.

Because of my foolishness - This may either signify sin as the cause of his present affliction, or it may import an affliction which was the consequence of that foolish levity which prefers the momentary gratification of an irregular passion to health of body and peace of mind.

PSALM 38: 6 I am pained and bowed down greatly. I go mourning all day long.

Verse 6

I am troubled - In mind. I am bowed down in body. I am altogether afflicted, and full of distress.

PSALM 38: 7 For my waist is filled with burning. There is no soundness in my flesh.

Verse 7

For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease - Or rather, a burning; נקלה nikleh, from קלה kalah, to fry, scorch, etc., hence נקלה nikleh, a burning, or strongly feverish disease.

There is no soundness in my flesh - All without and all within bears evidence that the whole of my solids and fluids are corrupt.

PSALM 38: 8 I am faint and severely bruised. I have groaned by reason of the anguish of my heart.

Verse 8

I am feeble and sore broken - I am so exhausted with my disease that I feel as if on the brink of the grave, and unfit to appear before God; therefore "have I roared for the disquietness of my heart."

That David describes a natural disease here cannot reasonably be doubted; but what that disease was, who shall attempt to say? However, this is evident, that whatever it was, he most deeply deplored the cause of it; and as he worthily lamented it, so he found mercy at the hand of God. It would be easy to show a disease of which what he here enumerates are the very general symptoms; but I forbear, because in this I might attribute to one what, perhaps, in Judea would be more especially descriptive of another.

PSALM 38: 9 Lord, all my desire is before you. My groaning is not hidden from you.

Verse 9

Lord, all my desire is before thee - I long for nothing so much as thy favor; and for this my heart is continually going out after thee. Instead of אֲדֹנָי Adonai, Lord, several of Dr. Kennicott's MSS. have יהוה Yehovah.

PSALM 38: 10 My heart throbs. My strength fails me. As for the light of my eyes, it has also left me.

Verse 10

My heart panteth - סַחֲרָחַר secharchar, flutters, palpitates, through fear and alarm.

My strength faileth - Not being able to take nourishment.

The light of mine eyes - is gone - I can scarcely discern any thing through the general decay of my health and vigor, particularly affecting my sight.

PSALM 38: 11 My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my plague. My kinsmen stand far away.

Verse 11

My lovers - Those who professed much affection for me; my friends, רְעִי reai, my companions, who never before left my company, stand aloof.

My kinsmen - קְרוֹבֵי kerobai, my neighbors, stand afar off. I am deserted by all, and they stand off because of נִגְעִי nigj, my plague. They considered me as suffering under a Divine judgment; and, thinking me an accursed being, they avoided me lest they should be infected by my disease.

PSALM 38: 12 They also who seek after my life lay snares. Those who seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and meditate deceits all day long.

Verse 12

They also that seek after my life - They act towards me as huntsmen after their prey; they lay snares to take away my life. Perhaps this means only that they wished for his death, and would have been glad to have had it in their power to end his days. Others spoke all manner of evil of him, and told falsities against him all the day long.

PSALM 38: 13 But I, as a deaf man, don't hear. I am as a mute man who doesn't open his mouth.

Verse 13

But I, as a deaf man - I was conscious of my guilt, I could not vindicate myself; and I was obliged in silence to bear their insults.

PSALM 38: 14 Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs.

Verse 14

No reproofs - תוכחות tochachoth, arguments or vindications; a forensic term. I was as a man accused in open court, and I could make no defense.

PSALM 38: 15 For in you, LORD, do I hope. You will answer, Lord my God.

Verse 15

In thee, O Lord, do I hope - I have no helper but thee.

Thou wilt hear, O Lord my God - Thou art eternal in thy compassions, and wilt hear the prayer of a penitent soul. In the printed copies of the Hebrew text we have אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהַי Adonai Elohai, Lord my God; but, instead of אֲדֹנָי Adonai, one hundred and two of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. read יְהוָה Yehovah. As this word is never pronounced by the Jews, and they consider it dreadfully sacred, in reading, wherever it occurs, they pronounce אֲדֹנָי Adonai; and we may well suppose that Jewish scribes, in writing out copies of the sacred Scriptures, would as naturally write Adonai for Yehovah, as they would in reading supply the former for the latter.

PSALM 38: 16 For I said, "Don't let them gloat over me, or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."

Verse 16

When my foot slippeth - They watched for my halting; and when my foot slipped, they rejoiced that I had fallen into sin!

PSALM 38: 17 For I am ready to fall. My pain is continually before me.

Verse 17

For I am ready to halt - Literally, I am prepared to halt. So completely infirm is my soul, that it is impossible for me to take one right step in the way of righteousness, unless strengthened by thee.

PSALM 38: 18 For I will declare my iniquity. I will be sorry for my sin.

Verse 18

I will declare mine iniquity - I will confess it with the deepest humiliation and self-abasement.

PSALM 38: 19 But my enemies are vigorous and many. Those who hate me without reason are numerous.

Verse 19

But mine enemies are lively - Instead of **חיים** *chaiyim*, lively, I would read **כינם** *chinam*, without cause; a change made by the half of one letter, **נ** nun for a **י** yod. See the parallel places, Psa 35:19 (note); Psa 79:5 (note). See also the Preliminary Dissertation to Dr. Lowth's Isaiah, p. 40: "But without cause my enemies have strengthened themselves; and they who wrongfully hate me are multiplied." Here the one member of the verse answers to the other.

PSALM 38: 20 They who also render evil for good are adversaries to me, because I follow what is good.

Verse 20

Because I follow the thing that good is - The translation is as bad as the sentence is awkward. **תחת טוב רדפי** *tachath rodpi tob*, because I follow goodness. There is a remarkable addition to this verse in the Arabic: "They have rejected me, the beloved one, as an abominable dead carcass; they have pierced my body with nails." I suppose the Arabic translator meant to refer this to Christ.

None of the other Versions have any thing like this addition; only the Ethiopic adds, "They rejected their brethren as an unclean carcass." St. Ambrose says this reading was found in some Greek and Latin copies in his time; and Theodoret has nearly the same reading with the Arabic: Και απερριψαν με τον αγαπητον, ως νεκρον εβδελυγμενον· "And they cast me, the beloved, out, as an abominable dead carcass." Whence this reading came I cannot conjecture.

PSALM 38: 21 Don't forsake me, LORD. My God, don't be far from me.

Verse 21

Forsake me not, O Lord - Though all have forsaken me, do not thou.

Be not far from me - Though my friends keep aloof, be thou near to help me.

PSALM 38: 22 Hurry to help me, Lord, my salvation.

Verse 22

Make haste to help me - I am dying; save, Lord, or I perish. Whoever carefully reads over this Psalm will see what a grievous and bitter thing it is to sin against the Lord, and especially to sin after having known his mercy, and after having escaped from the corruption that is in the world. Reader, be on thy guard; a life of righteousness may be lost by giving way to a moment's temptation, and a fair character sullied for ever! Let him that most assuredly standeth take heed lest he fall. 'Tis but a grain of sweet that one can sow,

To reap a harvest of wide-wasting wo.