

PSALM 38

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 38

A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance

This psalm was composed by David under some sore affliction, and when in great distress of mind by reason of sin, perhaps his sin with Bathsheba; and was written as a memorial of his sense of sin, of his great afflictions, and deliverance from them; and therefore is said to be “to bring to remembrance”, or to refresh his memory with the said things. Kimchi and Ben Melech think the psalm was made for the sake of such as are in distress, to put them in mind and teach them how to pray. The Targum calls the psalm,

“a good remembrance concerning Israel;”

and Jarchi says it was to remember the distress of Israel before the Lord, and that it is said with respect to all Israel; though others think the word “lehazcir” is the name of a psalm tune; and Aben Ezra was of opinion that it was the first word of some pleasant poem. The Septuagint version adds,

“concerning the sabbath,”

as if it was wrote to put persons in mind of that day; whereas there is nothing in the whole psalm that has any such tendency.

Ver. 1. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure,* etc.] This and the following clause are the same as in (^{490b}Psalm 6:1), only instead of wrath there it is anger.

Ver. 2. *For thine arrows stick fast in me,* etc.] Meaning either words with which as a father the Lord rebuked him; and which were sharp and cutting, entered into him and abode with him, and gave him much pain and uneasiness; and by which he concluded that his rebukes were in wrath and hot displeasure; such as those in (³⁰²¹2 Samuel 12:11); so the words of men are compared to arrows, (^{450b}Psalm 57:4 64:3) or outward afflictions, attended with inward trouble of soul; for as judgments are the arrows of God, such as famine, pestilence, etc. (²¹⁵⁶Ezekiel 5:16 ^{490b}Psalm 91:5,6)

(^{<1521>}Deuteronomy 32:21,42); so the chastening dispensations of Providence, under which the people of God themselves are, are so called, because they oftentimes come swiftly, suddenly, and at unawares, and are very pungent and distressing; and sometimes stick fast and continue long, by reason of which they are inwardly wounded, and conceive of God as sorely displeased with them; (see ^{<1816>}Job 6:4);

and thy hand presseth me sore; the afflicting hand of God, which lay heavy upon him; and is a mighty hand when laid on such worms as mortal sinful men are, who cannot bear up under it, unless they have divine supports; (see ^{<1822>}Job 19:21). This is by some supposed to be some bodily disease inflicted on him; some have thought of the leprosy, which was a stroke from the hand of God; but this is not likely, since he must have been deposed and shut up; the Jews indeed say ^{f534} that he was a leper six months, and that the divine Presence was taken from him; a late learned man ^{f536} thinks it was the smallpox, from the unsoundness of his flesh, the soreness of the disease, the stench of it, temporary blindness, and his friends standing aloof from him; though perhaps no other than affliction of mind for sin, comparable to the disease described, is meant.

Ver. 3. [*There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger*, etc.] Such was the nature of the affliction the psalmist laboured under, and which he took to be an effect of the anger of God towards him, that the whole frame of nature was affected with it, and from the crown of the head to, the soles of the feet there was no health or soundness, as in (^{<2006>}Isaiah 1:6); where the same word is used as here; some think the word ^{f537} here used has the signification of man; and that the sense is, that through, the violence of the distemper he had not so much, as the form of a man, as his antitype in (^{<2524>}Isaiah 52:14); and as this led him to a view of his sins, as the cause of his affliction, he was so far from thinking himself sound and whole, or perfect in a spiritual sense, that he saw he was all over diseased with sin, and that in his flesh dwelt no good thing;

neither [is there any] rest in my bones, because of my sin; or “peace” ^{f538} there; sin breaks the believer’s rest, and disturbs his peace; nor can he, in a view of it, find any rest in himself, nor in any creature, nor in any service or duty, only in Jesus Christ, his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice.

Ver. 4. [*For mine iniquities are gone over mine head*, etc.] Like an inundation of waters, as the waves and billows of the sea; for the waters to come up to the neck or chin shows great danger; but when they go over

the head the case is desperate, and a person is sinking and drowning; compare with this (^{<4950>}Psalm 69:1,2); the simile may denote both the number and weight of sins, and also signifies the overwhelming distress the psalmist was in, under a view of them;

as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me; the guilt of sin upon the conscience, without a view of pardon, lies heavy indeed, and makes a man a burden to himself, as it did Job, (^{<4872>}Job 7:20,21); yea, sin is not only grieving and afflicting to pardoned ones, and who know they are pardoned, but it is a burden to them under which they groan; nor is it possible for any so to bear it as to satisfy and make atonement for it; none but Christ could ever do this, and he has done it; nor is there any relief for burdened souls, but by looking to a sin bearing and sin atoning Saviour, and by casting the burden upon him, who invites them to him for rest.

Ver. 5. *My wounds stink, [and] are corrupt*, etc.] Meaning his sins, which had wounded him, and for which there is no healing but in a wounded Saviour, and by his stripes we are healed, (^{<2515>}Isaiah 53:5); where the same word is used as here; Christ's black and blue stripes and wounds, as the word signifies, are the healing of ours, both of sins, and of the effects of them; which, to a sensible sinner, are as nauseous and loathsome as an old wound that is festered and corrupt;

because of my foolishness: as all sin arises from foolishness, which is bound in the hearts of men, and from whence it arises, (^{<4072>}Mark 7:22); perhaps the psalmist may have respect to his folly with Bathsheba, which had been the occasion of all the distress that is spoken of both before and afterwards.

Ver. 6. *I am troubled*, etc.] Discomposed and perplexed in mind; his thoughts were disturbed and irregular, and in the utmost confusion and distress: this trouble was not only on account of the affliction that was upon him, but chiefly because of his sin; and which was increased by the view he had of the displeasure of God, concluding he was come forth against him in wrath and fury;

I am bowed down greatly; not in his body, at least not in that only, as if he was bowed together by his disorder, that he could not lift himself up; for he is said to walk in the next clause: or rather he bowed down his head as a bulrush voluntarily, and through sorrow and shame could not lift it up before the Lord; though it may chiefly design the pressure of his mind, that

his soul was cast down within him, and with all his spiritual reasonings he could not erect himself; it is the Lord that raiseth up those that are bowed down in this sense; (see ^{<1941>}Psalm 42:5,6,11 145:14);

I go mourning all the day long; or “I go black”, or “in black” ^{f539}; meaning either that his skin was black, through the disease upon him, and the trouble that was in him, (^{<1830>}Job 30:30); or that he was clothed in black garments, as a token of mourning; as white garments were of joy and cheerfulness, (^{<2107>}Ecclesiastes 9:7,8); and he was blacker still in his own apprehension, by reason of inward corruptions and outward transgressions, which appeared in a very black hue, attended with aggravating circumstances; (see ^{<2106>}Song of Solomon 1:5 ^{<1517>}Psalm 51:7).

Ver. 7. *For my loins are filled with a loathsome [disease]*, etc.] The word here used has the signification of burning ^{f540}; and the Targum renders it, “my loins are filled with burning”; a burning fever was upon him, or there was an inflammation in those parts; a hot burning ulcer, which might be nauseous; and so was true in both senses. Aben Ezra interprets it abominable and vile; something not fit to be mentioned; and so Kimchi and Ben Melech. The word is rendered sometimes “lightly esteemed”; as in (^{<1823>}1 Samuel 18:23); and Jarchi thinks it has this sense here; and the meaning is, that he was vile in his own eyes, and mean in his own esteem. Doubtless the psalmist has reference to something more than a bodily disease; at least not to that only, but to the disease of his soul also, sin, which has the nature of a disease; it is an hereditary one, which is derived from one to another by propagation; it is universal, and reaches to all men, and to all the parts of the body and powers of the soul; it is a complication of disorders: it is in its own nature mortal, and ever incurable but by Christ; and, as here, it is a loathsome one; it is loathsome to God, and to all sensible sinners: and when the psalmist says his loins were filled with it, it may signify that it was an internal disorder that was in him; sin that dwelt in him, a law in his members; and may denote the aboundings of sin in him, the swarms of corruptions that were in him; as also the pain it gave him, and the quick sense he had of it;

and [there is] no soundness in my flesh: which is repeated, (see ^{<1988>}Psalm 38:3); partly for confirmation’s sake, and partly to show the continued sense of it, as persons under a disorder are continually making mention of it.

Ver. 8. *I am feeble*, etc.] Both in body, natural strength being weakened by the affliction, and dried up like a potsherd by the heat of the distemper; and in soul, being weak in the exercise of faith and other graces. The word is used of Jacob, fainting at and disbelieving the news of his son Joseph being alive, (⁽¹⁴⁵³⁾Genesis 45:26);

and sore broken; in his constitution with the disease, and in his mind with trouble; especially for his sin, and under a sense of the divine displeasure; his bones were broken by his fall, and his heart broken with a sense of sin, (⁽¹⁵¹⁸⁾Psalms 51:8,17);

I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart: which was like the raging of the sea, as the word ^{f541} rendered disquietness here signifies; and to which the uneasiness and restlessness of wicked men is sometimes compared, (⁽²¹⁶⁰⁾Isaiah 5:30 57:20); and so great was the disquietude of this good man under affliction, and sense of sin and wrath, that he had no rest night nor day; and could not forbear crying out, in a very hideous manner, like the roaring of a lion.

Ver. 9. *Lord, all my desire [is] before thee*, etc.] To be delivered from his afflictions, to have a discovery and application of pardoning grace, and to have communion with his God: the desire of his soul was unto these things; and it was some satisfaction to him that it was before the Lord, and known unto him, before whom all things are naked and open;

and my groaning is not hid from thee; under the weight of his affliction, the burden of his sin, and which he expressed in prayer to the Lord, and which is often done with groanings which cannot be uttered: but even these are known and understood by the Lord.

Ver. 10. *My heart panteth*, etc.] Or “goes about” ^{f542}; runs here and there, and finds no rest; as Aben Ezra interprets the word from the Targum he cites; though the Targum we have renders it, “my heart shakes with fear”, or dread, as persons in a fever. Jarchi interprets the word, surrounded with grief; it denotes the panting or palpitation of the heart, through sorrow and dread, and the failing of it, even as at death;

my strength faileth me, or “forsakes me” ^{f543}; bodily strength and spiritual strength; the strength of faith, hope, and confidence;

as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me; which is often the case of persons under bodily disorders, their eyes grow dim, and sight fails

them; and this might be true in a spiritual sense of the psalmist, who had lost sight of God as his covenant God; of his interest in his love, in the blessings of his grace, and in eternal salvation, and was walking in darkness, and saw no light.

Ver. 11. *My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore*, etc.] As if it was a plague sore, lest they should be infected with it; or because they could not bear the stench of his wounds, and the loathsomeness of his disease, or to see him in his agonies, and hear his roaring and his groans, (^{<BRD>}Psalm 38:2,3,5,7-9); or as taking his case to be desperate, as if he was just dying, and no help could be given him, (^{<BRD>}Psalm 38:10); If it was the leprosy, as some Jewish writers have affirmed, the word [gn, translated “sore”, being used for the plague of the leprosy, they were obliged by the ceremonial law to keep at a distance from him: but this rather seems to be voluntary, and to proceed from neglect and contempt. These “lovers” and “friends” were such for whom David had had an affection, and had been friendly to, and therefore it was ungrateful in them to act the part they did; and such who had pretended love and friendship to him in his health and prosperity, but now had deserted him, which is a common case; (see ^{<BRD>}Job 19:13,14,19 ^{<BRD>}Psalm 69:8 88:18). Afflictions try men’s friends; and as that is a time when friendly visits are most wanting and most useful, so it is an aggravation of the affliction, and makes it the heavier when such are denied;

and my kinsmen stand afar off; that were near to him by the ties of nature or friendship.

Ver. 12. *They also that seek after my life*, etc.] His avowed and implacable enemies, whom nothing would satisfy but the taking away of his life: these came too near him; for these, he says,

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, (^{<BRD>}Psalm 124:7);

and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things; to the injury of his character and reputation:

and imagine deceits all the day long; contrive artful schemes to deceive; (see ^{<BRD>}Psalm 35:20).

Ver. 13. *But I, as a deaf [man], heard not*, etc.] He acted the part of a deaf man, and made as if he did not hear the mischievous things his

enemies spoke; as Saul, when the sons of Belial spoke against him and despised him, (^{<0107>}1 Samuel 10:27); and as our Lord when his enemies accused him, (^{<0172>}Matthew 27:12-14);

and [I was] as a dumb man, [that] openeth not his mouth; made no reply to what they said, and did not render railing for railing; in which Christ was the antitype of him, (^{<2830>}Isaiah 53:7 ^{<0172>}1 Peter 2:23 3:9).

Ver. 14. *Thus I was as a man that heareth not*, etc.] Any thing that is said unto him; he took no more notice of it than if he had never heard it; but bore all the railings and calumnies of men with calmness and patience;

and in whose mouth [are] no reproofs; as if he had nothing to say for himself, in vindication of his character, and to the refutation of his enemies; as if he had no arguments to make use of, for the conviction and reproof of his adversaries.

Ver. 15. *For in thee, O Lord, do I hope*, etc.] That he would plead his cause against his accusers and revilers, and who sought his hurt; that he should be delivered out of their hands, and out of all his afflictions; that he should be healed of his diseases, both of soul and body, under which he laboured; and should again enjoy the light of God's countenance, and have the discoveries of his pardoning grace and mercy; and this was the reason why he was so calm and quiet amidst the unkindnesses of his friends, and the cruel usage of his enemies;

thou wilt hear, or "answer",

O Lord my God; in the midst of all his distresses of body and mind, he had not given up his interest in God, as his God and Father; which is the great blessing of the covenant of grace, and which ever continues; and is the great support of believers, under whatsoever they meet with in soul and body, from friends or foes; this his God the psalmist believed would not only hear his cries in his sore distress, but hear the reproaches of his enemies, and answer them in a providential way in his own time, by terrible things in righteousness to their conviction and confusion; and therefore he himself was silent.

Ver. 16. *For I said, [hear me]*, etc.] This he had expressed in prayer to God; he had committed his cause to him, and entreated him that he would hear and answer him; giving this as a reason,

lest [otherwise] they should rejoice over me; at his misfortunes and calamities, at the continuance of his trouble and distress, both of body and mind;

when my foot slippeth; as it sometimes did through the corruptions of nature, the temptations of Satan, and the snares of the world; which is more or less the case of all the people of God, who are all subject to slips and falls, though they shall not finally and totally fall away;

they magnify [themselves] against me; that is, his enemies exulted and triumphed over him: this was what he found by experience; and therefore makes use of it as an argument with God, that he would hear and answer and deliver him out of his trouble, and preserve him from falling.

Ver. 17. *For I [am] ready to halt*, etc.] Meaning either that there was a proneness in him to sin; (see ^{<400>}Jeremiah 20:10); or that he was subject to affliction and adversity, as the same word is rendered in (^{<495>}Psalm 35:15); and the words are either a reason and argument used with the Lord, to hear and keep his foot from slipping, that so his enemies might not rejoice over him, and magnify themselves against him; as they would do should he fall into sin or into any calamity, both which he was liable to: or they are a reason why he was so calm and quiet under the ill usage he met with from friends and enemies, because he was “ready for halting”, or “prepared” ^{f544} for it; he considered that he was born for trouble and adversity; that God had appointed him to it, and it was appointed for him, and therefore he was quiet under it; (see ^{<486>}Job 5:6,7 23:14); he was prepared to meet it; he expected it, it being the common lot of God’s people; and therefore when it came upon him it was no strange thing to him. The Septuagint version, and those that follow that, render the words, “I am ready for scourges”; and Jerom applies them to Christ, who was ready to undergo scourges, sufferings, and death itself, for his people;

and my sorrow [is] continually before me; that is, for his sin, which was ever before him, stared him in the face, lay heavy on his conscience, and appeared very terrible and loathsome to him; his sorrow for it was without intermission, and was a godly sorrow, a sorrow for sin, as committed against a God of love, grace, and mercy: or he may mean, that his affliction, which was grievous to him, was continually upon him night and day: our Lord himself, David’s antitype, was a man of sorrows all his days.

Ver. 18. *For I will declare mine iniquity*, etc.] Either to men, to ease his mind, justify God in his proceedings with him, and for their caution and admonition: or rather to God, against whom he had sinned, and who only could pardon him; with a view to which he was determined to make a free and open confession of it before him:

I will be sorry for my sin, or “careful” ^{f545} about it; that is, how he committed it for the future: true repentance for sin produces a carefulness to abstain from all appearance of it; (see ~~<5070>~~ 2 Corinthians 7:10,11).

Ver. 19. *But mine enemies [are] lively*, etc.] Or “living” ^{f546} or “live”; not in a spiritual sense; for they had no lively hope, nor living faith, but were dead in trespasses and sins; nor merely in a natural sense, or corporeally, so David was living himself; but in great prosperity and worldly happiness, and so were brisk and cheerful, and lived a merry and pleasant life;

[and] they are strong; not only hale and robust in body, but abounded in riches and wealth, which are the strength of wicked men;

and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied; that is, such as hated him without a cause, and made lies and falsehoods the reasons of it: these increased in numbers, or in their outward state and circumstances; (see ~~<4970>~~ Psalm 73:4,5,7,12 69:4).

Ver. 20. *They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries*, etc.] (See Gill on “~~<4952>~~ Psalm 35:12”);

because I follow [the thing that] good [is]; or “follow good”; a good God, whom his soul followed hard after, (~~<4968>~~ Psalm 63:8); the good Shepherd of the sheep, who led him into green pastures, whither he followed him, (~~<4920>~~ Psalm 23:1-3); the good Spirit of God his guide, whom he walked after, (~~<4800>~~ Romans 8:1); good and holy men of God, whom he took for examples and copied after; and every good work, which he pursued with eagerness and pleasure; and all this drew upon him the hatred of his adversaries.

Ver. 21. *Forsake me not, O Lord*, etc.] Or continue not to forsake; for he seems to have been under divine desertion, and might be under apprehensions that God had utterly forsaken him; which he entreats he would not, though his friends had forsook him, and his own strength had failed and left him, (~~<4980>~~ Psalm 38:10,11);

O my God, be not far from me; as to his gracious presence, and with respect to help and deliverance, otherwise God is not far from any of his creatures, being omnipresent.

Ver. 22. *Make haste and help me*, etc.] Or, “for my help”; his case required haste, and God does help his people when none else can, and that right early;

O Lord, my salvation; by which it appears that his prayer was a prayer of faith; 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; that is an abiding grace, and will continue under the influence of the author and finisher of it, until the end of it is received, the salvation of the soul. R. Moses ^{f547} thinks the phrase “make haste” is to be repeated here, and read thus, “make haste, O Lord, to my salvation”.