

PSALM 38

SIN, THE TERROR OF THE LAW, AND DAVID'S PLEA FOR MERCY

AUTHOR: David

INTRODUCTION: The superscription attributes authorship of Psalm 38 to David, titled "to bring to remembrance" (also the superscription to Psalm 70). To petition the LORD to remember is actually a call for Him to act on behalf of the petitioner. In this psalm, David despairs over the awful sinfulness of his own sin. The situation of the sinner under the Law of Moses was indeed one of despair, for the Law made no provision for the forgiveness of *willful* sin (cf. Lev4:2,13,22,27; 5:15,18; Heb10:4,26-28); that awaited the "propitiation" made by the Lord Jesus Christ for "the sins of the whole world" (1Jn2:2). This led O.T. saints to cry out to the LORD and appeal for mercy. Commentators have speculated in vain as to the occasion in David's life that gave rise to this psalm, but no specific time or event can be ascertained such that the entire life of David appears to be in view. Typologically, Psalm 38 prefigures the repentance of the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation, which results in the return of Christ (cf. Hos5:15-6:2; Zech12:10-13:1); there are many points of similarity with the Book of Job, which also typifies Israel during the Tribulation. Psalm 38 is read by Jews on the Day of Atonement and is categorized as a penitential psalm (along with Psalms 6, 32, 51, 102, 130, and 143).

THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

- [1] David realizes that his sin deserves the LORD's "chasten[ing]" (i.e., discipline applied for the purpose of correction), if not His "wrath" (i.e., judgment). His concern is that the "Lord" would not deal with him in "wrath" or "displeasure" as He might toward an unbeliever or an enemy. Typologically, this points to the Tribulation, when the "wrath" of God is poured out upon the whole world (cf. Rev6:16-17; 14:10; 16:1,19).
- [2] This suggests that David recognizes that the LORD's chastening has already come upon him. Compare to Job 6:4.
- [3] David has no "rest" because of his "sin" and the thought of the LORD's "anger" over it.
- [4] David confesses his "iniquities" are "too heavy for me", a recognition that there is nothing he can do about the offence his sins are to the LORD. Compare to Job 23:2.
- [5] David recognizes the sinfulness of his own sin (i.e., "stink", "corrupt") and attributes it to "foolishness" on his part. Note, "foolishness" (i.e., folly) is the antonym of wisdom.
- [6] The burden of David's (unforgiven) sin manifests itself in continual "mourning" (i.e., grief, sorrow).
- [7] David's sin caused his body to be physically afflicted.

- [8] David's spirit/heart is "broken" by his sin (Cp., Ps51:17). The "disquietness" of David's "heart" indicates a continual condition of having no peace (Cp., Rom5:1).
- [9] David appeals to the LORD to look beyond his sinful actions and view the "desire" of his heart. Whereas Solomon desired of the LORD wisdom (1Kgs3:5,9; 2Chron1:10), David's one desire was "that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life" (i.e., intimate fellowship with the LORD; Ps27:4).
- [10] David's body suffered physically in his state of despair.
- [11] Even David's "lovers", "friends", and "kinsmen" separated themselves from David because of his sins. Compare Job 19:13. Typologically points to Christ (cf. Luk23:54).
- [12] Under the Law of Moses, these tribulations in the life of David were a result of his personal sins.
- [13] Typologically, David "openeth not his mouth" (cf. Isa53:7).
- [14] David (and Christ) did not speak because there was no "reproof" he could offer his accusers for his sin. He was indeed guilty of sin, as was Christ when He took on the sins of the world (cf. 2Cor5:21).

DAVID'S PLEA FOR MERCY

- [15] David does not look to the Law of Moses and its promised blessings, contingent upon faithfulness to its covenant requirements, but his "hope" is in the "LORD". Note, "LORD" (Heb., Jehovah), "Lord" (Heb., Adonai), and "God" (Heb., Elohim) each appear in this verse.
- [16] David needs an the LORD to "Hear" him and intercede on his behalf (Cp., Heb7:25; Rev12:10-11).
- [17] David's continual "sorrow" for his sin has brought his life to a "halt"; he is paralyzed in despair.
- [18] To "declare mine iniquity" is to confess one's sin. The Greek word that is translated *confess* is ὁμολογεω (Lit., to say the same word). To "be sorry for my sin" is not the same thing as repentance, but "godly sorrow" can lead to "repentance" (2Cor7:10).
- [19] David's personal sins emboldened his many "enemies", even causing them to "hate [him] wrongfully". David's greatest enemy was Satan, "the accuser of our brethren", "which accused [him] before our God day and night" (Rev12:10). Thus, our personal sins give Satan an opportunity to accuse us before God (Cp., 2Cor6:3).
- [20] The godly "follow the thing that is good" (i.e., God alone; Mk10:18; Luk18:19), whereas those "that render evil for good" are the "adversaries" of both godly men and God.
- [21] David's petition of the "LORD" is "Forsake me not". To "forsake" is to *depart from* or to *abandon*. Thus, the second clause, "be not far from me", is synonymous parallelism. In the Davidic Covenant, God promised to never take His mercy away from David (2Sam7:15). This personal

promise of eternal security is called "the sure mercies of David" (Isa55:3; Act13:34).

- [22] David's petition for the "LORD" to "make haste to help me" is a plea for mercy, where mercy is a withholding of judgment that is deserved. David stands condemned under the Law of Moses, which cannot offer mercy (cf. Rom3:20; Heb10:28), but somehow his "salvation" depends on the "Lord" (Cp., Gal2:16). As the prophet Habakkuk prayed, "in wrath remember mercy" (Hab3:2), David wanted the "Lord" to remember to be merciful (Tit3:5). This paradox remained unresolved until the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1Jn2:2). Compare typologically to Zechariah 5:15-6:2; during the Tribulation, with a rebuilt Temple again offering animal sacrifices for the sins of the nation, the Jews will again be confronted with the realization that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb10:4).