

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

more light to break forth from his word, let us beware of closing up the very avenues by which that light may reach us!

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "Never envy the wicked". This is well enough to say—how do we know we are envying, or not envying the wicked? Discuss.
2. The seeds of self-destruction are planted in the actions of the wicked—so what is the responsibility of the believer?
3. Waiting is the most difficult of our responses to God's will—why?
4. Anger—wrath—worry—fretting—all these lead to harm. Name and discuss the specific harm involved.
5. The promises to the godly are numerous notice verses: 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23—here are ten and we are only half-way through the psalm—so what?
6. There was a man in the Old Testament who faced and answered the basic problem of this psalm—what was his name and what was his answer?
7. Someone well said that "evil is mortal, and righteousness is immortal"—what are the implications of this truth?
8. God has a sense of humor—read verses 12 and 13 to see what makes God laugh—is He laughing at our problem? Cf. Psalms 2:9.
9. If the moral principle of retribution was not at work, history would have no meaning and the present-day utter pessimism would have real relevance—Discuss.
10. Read verses 32-40 to obtain a summary and final answer to the problem here discussed.

## PSALM 38

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer for Deliverance from Disease and from Enemies.

### ANALYSIS

Part I. *Against Disease.* Stanza I., vers 1, 2, Jehovah's Anger Deprecated. Stanza II., ver. 3-5, The Psalmist traces his Disease to his Sin. Stanza

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III., vers. 6-8, Describes Effect of Disease on Himself. Stanza IV., vers. 9-11, On his Friends.

Part II. *Against Enemies.* Stanza I., vers 12-14, Enemies' Perfidy—How Treated by Psalmist. Stanza II., vers. 15-18, Reasons for so treating it. Stanza III., vers. 19-22, The Character and Strength of his Enemies move the psalmist to Importunity in Prayer.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David—To bring to Remembrance.  
(Part I.)

- 1 Jehovah! do not in thy vexation correct me,  
nor in thy wrath chastise me;<sup>1</sup>
- 2 For thine arrows have sunk down in me,  
and thy hand hath sunk down upon me.
- 3 There is no soundness in my flesh by reason of thine  
indignation,  
no wholeness in my bones by reason of my sin;
- 4 For mine iniquities have passed over my head,  
like a burden that is heavy they are too heavy for me:
- 5 My weals stink they fester,  
by reason of my foolishness.
- 6 I am bent I am bowed very low,  
all the day have I gloomily walked;
- 7 For my loins are filled with shame,<sup>2</sup>  
and there is no wholeness in my flesh;
- 8 I am benumbed and crushed exceedingly,  
I have roared with the growl of a lion.<sup>3</sup>
- 9 Sovereign Lord! before thee is all my desire,  
and my sighing from thee is not hid.
- 10 My heart fluttereth<sup>4</sup> my strength hath forsaken me,  
and the light of mine eyes<sup>5</sup>—even they are not with me;
- 11 My lovers and my friends from before my stroke<sup>6</sup> stand aloof,  
and my neighbours at a distance remain.

1. Cp. 6:1.

2. "That which is contemned"—Br. (after ancient versions). Or: "burning"; so Dr., Del., Per. Leaser ("burning disease").

3. So *Gt.*—Gn.: and so Br.

4. "Palpitates"—O.G. "Is in a ferment"—Br. "Throbbeth violently"—Del.

5. Cp. Eze. 24:16.

6. Note the word: *nega'*—"esp. of a disease, regarded as sent by divine chastisement"—O.G. and note its occurrences in Lev. 13, 14; 2 S. 7:14, Ps. 38:11, 39:10, 89:32, Isa. 53:8. "The word is especially used of the plague of leprosy"—Kp.

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(Part II.)

- 12 And they who seek my life<sup>1</sup> have laid snares,  
and they who study my hurt have threatened engulfing ruin;  
and deceitful things all the day do they mutter.
- 13 But I am as one deaf—I do not hear,  
and as one dumb who openeth not his mouth.<sup>2</sup>
- 14 Thus have I become as a man who cannot hear,  
and in whose mouth are no replies.
- 15 Because for thee have I waited,  
thou thyself wilt answer Sovereign Lord My God.
- 16 Lest mine enemies rejoice over me,—  
when my feet slipped against me they did great things.
- 17 Because I to stumble am ready,  
and my pain is before me continually;
- 18 Because mine iniquity must I declare,  
I am anxious by reason of my sin.
- 19 Since mine enemies without cause have become strong,  
and multiplied are they who hate me for false reason;
- 20 And they who repay evil for good  
are mine adversaries because I pursue good
- 21 Do not forsake me Jehovah,  
my God! be not far from me:
- 22 Oh haste thee to my help,  
Sovereign Lord! my salvation!

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician. (CMM.) To Jeduthun.<sup>3</sup>

## PARAPHRASE

### PSALM 38

O Lord, don't punish me while You are angry!

2 Your arrows have struck deep; Your blows are crushing me.

3, 4 Because of Your anger my body is sick, my health is broken beneath my sins. They are like a flood, higher than my head; they are a burden too heavy to bear.

5, 6 My wounds are festering and full of pus. Because of my sins I am bent and racked with pain. My days are filled with anguish.

1. U: "soul."

2. Cp. Isa. 58:7.

3. Prob. leader of Male Choir, having "thanks and confession" specially under his care. Other Jeduthun psalms are 61, 76. "Sheminith" prob. indicates the same choir. Cp. Intro. Chap., II., 3.

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7 My loins burn with inflammation<sup>1</sup> and my whole body is diseased.

8 I am exhausted and crushed: I groan in despair.<sup>2</sup>

9 Lord, You know how I long for my health once more. You hear my every sigh.

10 My heart beats wildly, my strength fails, and I am going blind.

11 My loved ones and friends stay away, fearing my disease. Even my own family stands at a distance.

12 Meanwhile my enemies are trying to kill me. They plot my ruin and spend all their waking hours planning treachery.

13, 14 But I am deaf to all their threats; I am silent before them as a man who cannot speak. I have nothing to say.

15 For I am waiting for You, O Lord my God. Come and protect me.

16 Put an end to their arrogance, these who gloat when I am cast down!

17 How constantly I find myself upon the verge of sin;<sup>3</sup> this source of sorrow always stares me in the face.

18 I confess my sins; I am sorry for what I have done.

19 But my enemies persecute with vigor, and continue to hate me—though I have done nothing against them to deserve it.

20 They repay me evil for good and hate me for standing for the right.

21 Don't leave me, Lord! Don't go away!

22 Come quickly! Help me, O my Savior.

## EXPOSITION

Our analysis suggests that this psalm is divisible into two parts; not because there are any outward signs of such division, but solely for the purpose of drawing attention to the fact, which becomes clear on examination, that there are two distinct strains of thought in the psalm, however closely they are conjoined. For three stanzas the prayer is solely for the removal of disease, without any allusion to enemies. Then, for three more stanzas, there is a sustained reference to enemies, with only a bare allusion to disease. In both parts of the psalm the

1. Implied.

2. Or, "Because of the pains in my heart."

3. Literally, "I am ready to fall."

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writer acknowledges that he has sinned; but this confession is naturally more frank and solemn in the former part than in the latter. The whole psalm may well have been indited by David, even as it is inscribed to him: the only surprising—but by no means incredible—thing is, as we are beginning to discover, that David was severely chastised for his great sin by the direct infliction, from Jehovah's own hand, of a loathsome disease, concerning which the history in Samuel and Chronicles is silent. However surprising such silence may at first sight appear, it is so far from being incredible that on reflection it seems natural, or at least excusable. No royal scribe would feel called on to record the damaging fact in the public chronicles; and it may well have been that even the faithful prophetic historian of the time felt relieved of any duty to insert in his narrative an account of an affliction endured in almost unbroken silence by the erring but still beloved monarch. Notwithstanding which, however, now that, after all these centuries, we look back on those distant times, and realise afresh the dishonour done by David to the name of Jehovah and to the sanctity of his ways,—we cannot fail to discover something more than poetic justice, that the terrible secret should long ago have come out; and THAT in just the very best way conceivable,—namely, by disclosure from the offending monarch's own mouth,—slightly veiled by poetic allusion rather than by blunt narration, and divulged amidst the solemnities of the worship of Him who is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity, yet still plainly confessed and sorely lamented. If anything were yet wanting to impart a finishing-touch of moral and aesthetic fitness to the manner of the revelation, it would be found in the reflection, which Dr. Thirtle has brought home to us, that we probably owe it to David's loving son Hezekiah that these Davidic confessions of Divinely inflicted disease ever saw the light. When once Hezekiah had himself groaned under a similar Divine infliction—though not perhaps for the like cause— and been again mercifully raised up from his couch of tears, then was prepared a joint-author of psalmody of sufficiently refined and sanctified culture to be entrusted with the delicate task of deciding that these snatches of leper-songs should find place in Temple worship. He, finding the leper-wail of Uzziah in the palace library, could be trusted to find place for it in his gallery of sufferers in Ps. 31, where it could serve to strike a preliminary note and thus prepare us—as the sixth

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psalm had in a measure prepared us—for the fuller and more personal confessions of the psalm now before us, and then for the further confessions of Ps. 39, in both of which the leper-wail is heard and leper-disfigurement is seen; after which the renewed confessions of Pss. 40, 41, 51 and others no longer surprise us. Henceforth, it may be surmised, we shall handle these reminiscences of an exciting creative age in Israel, with a tender reverence which only a measurably adequate appreciation of their spiritual origin could have inspired. After this, it seems but commonplace to observe, as before noted, that David's wail over a Divinely inflicted disease, as a direct punishment for his sin, is pointed with a franker and more explicit confession of his transgressions, than are his complaints of the treacherous friends who had now turned against him. Doubtless, it was due to his sin that they were permitted thus to wrong him, and it was well even in this connection, that he should *declare his iniquity* and be *anxious by reason of his sin*; but we can well understand that the royal transgressor felt that many of the wounds he was now receiving from his enemies were such as *they*, at least, had no right to inflict, of which infliction therefore he had good cause to complain. If these things are noted, the psalm will be ready to all the greater and more varied edification. We have only to add that the *Chief Musician's* assignment of this pathetic psalm to *Jeduthun*, as leader of the Male Choir, commends itself as most appropriate, and would probably hold good for the similar psalm that follows.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does this psalm tell us of God's punishment of David? Discuss.
2. The psalmist surely associates his sickness with his sin—why?
3. Can affluent America ever recognize her sin? Will it take physical sickness—pain—weakness—even poverty to bring us to repentance? Discuss.
4. David (or whoever is involved in the psalm) never lost hope—why?
5. The person-to-person relationship—i.e. as it relates to God and the psalmist is a very big part of all the psalms—haven't we depersonalized everything including God? Discuss.