

## Psalm 38

*Prayer of Exhausted Conviction, for Protection.\*  
A Psalm of David, for a memorial.*

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath,  
And chasten me not in Your burning anger.
- <sup>2</sup> For Your arrows have sunk deep into me,  
And Your hand has pressed down on me.
- <sup>3</sup> There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation;  
There is no health in my bones because of my sin.
- <sup>4</sup> For my iniquities are gone over my head;  
As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.
- <sup>5</sup> My wounds grow foul and fester  
Because of my folly.
- <sup>6</sup> I am bent over and greatly bowed down;  
I go mourning all day long.
- <sup>7</sup> For my loins are filled with burning,  
And there is no soundness in my flesh.
- <sup>8</sup> I am benumbed and badly crushed;  
I groan because of the agitation of my heart.
- <sup>9</sup> Lord, all my desire is before You;  
And my sighing is not hidden from You.
- <sup>10</sup> My heart throbs, my strength fails me;  
And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.
- <sup>11</sup> My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague;  
And my kinsmen stand afar off.
- <sup>12</sup> Those who seek my life lay snares for me;  
And those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction,  
And they devise treachery all day long.
- <sup>13</sup> But I, like a deaf man, do not hear;  
And I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
- <sup>14</sup> Yes, I am like a man who does not hear,  
And in whose mouth are no arguments.
- <sup>15</sup> For I hope in You, O LORD;  
You will answer, O Lord my God.
- <sup>16</sup> For I said, 'May they not rejoice over me,  
Who, when my foot slips, would magnify themselves against me.'
- <sup>17</sup> For I am ready to fall,  
And my sorrow is continually before me.
- <sup>18</sup> For I confess my iniquity;  
I am full of anxiety because of my sin.
- <sup>19</sup> But my enemies are vigorous and strong,  
And many are those who hate me wrongfully.
- <sup>20</sup> And those who repay evil for good,  
They oppose me, because I follow what is good.
- <sup>21</sup> Do not forsake me, O LORD;  
O my God, do not be far from me!
- <sup>22</sup> Make haste to help me,  
O Lord, my salvation!

*David the Psalmist:* This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. God anointed David to be king (1 Sam.16), but King Saul refused to yield and mobilized forces to kill him. He had presumably experienced at least one deliverance from King Saul, who was hunting him (Ps.18; 1 Sam.24).

v.1 – 10: Sin is like a sickness, a burning fever, and a weakness.

v.12: *David's enemies, pre-enthronement:* Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They probably sought any advantage over David, including when he was slower and hesitant to make decisions because of his own sin.

v.17: "I am ready to fall" could refer to physical exhaustion, or perhaps moral temptation.

### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry:* These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the

English translation. Here's an example of a rhymed concept in v.2. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

Do not let        me                be ashamed;  
Do not let        my enemies        exult over me.

- *David's Trust in God's Promise:* David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
  - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed:* In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
  - *God Fulfilled His Promises:* In Genesis 1, God said, "Let there be light," and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God's promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

## Discussion Questions

1. What emotions is David feeling here?
  - a. Conviction of sin
  - b. Physical exhaustion
  - c. Self-doubt
  - d. Regret
  - e. Sorrow and mourning
  - f. Isolation and rejection to some degree from friends and family
  - g. Fear that his enemies will take advantage of him while he's feeling down and doubtful
  - h. Full of anxiety because of sin
2. In v.1 – 10, David seems to feel a weightiness for mistakes he has made. Have we experienced something similar?
  - a. Illus: When I made a mistake as a leader, by not supervising someone carefully enough, and that supervisee hurt someone under him and I didn't catch it or ask enough questions to bring the right amount of accountability, I felt terrible.
  - b. David probably realized that he gave a pronouncement or made a judgment about a situation that was wrong. It affected other people and cast some doubts on him.
  - c. Or, David might have made a strategic blunder out of his pride or carelessness. For example, in 1 Samuel 30, David and his men drew the Philistines to a vulnerable village, Ziklag, where their women and children were kidnapped.
  - d. Not every sin or mistake will feel like this. But some do.
3. In v.11 – 20, David notices how other people are responding to him in this situation. How were they responding?
  - a. Loved ones and friends and kinsmen (v.11): stand aloof
  - b. Enemies "lay snares for me" (v.12)
  - c. In v.13 – 14, why does David tune them out and not verbally respond to them?
    - i. They will just use it against him.
    - ii. They aren't looking to help him anyway.
    - iii. They aren't trying to help him wrestle down his sinfulness.
    - iv. One possible application here is that we don't necessarily have to share our deepest failures with everyone. But we do need to seek wise counsel from people who are trying to help us grow in our relationship with God.
  - d. In v.16, David says how he prayed. He asked God that his enemies not rejoice or magnify themselves against him.
    - i. Is he saying that when he prayed all the previous prayers for God to destroy His enemies or make them fall into their own traps, that he really only meant this? This seems mild.
    - ii. Or is he saying that this was a specific situation and prayer that was more recent?
    - iii. As David starts to lead more people as the new kingdom starts forming around him (1 Samuel 22:1 – 2, which follows Psalm 34), does David seem to become measured and precise?
  - e. David can be a model for us in our repentance and healing and restoration with God. Just because we have people who are trying to take advantage of us doesn't mean that we should hesitate in our repentance! We "follow what is good" (v.20)!
    - i. Illus: I know a man who had an affair while he was a pastor. He was worried that he would lose his job, and that there were people who opposed him for reasons that were more personal. Nevertheless, he resigned from his role as pastor and embarked on a journey of counseling and healing and repairing relations.
    - ii. David wasn't yet enthroned as king. But he also couldn't really back out of the job either. This puts him into a unique situation. We will see that in the next Psalm, Psalm 39.
    - iii. Application: So let's go to God boldly, and dwell on v.9 and v.18 to help us do that. Let's stop trying to hide from God, or treat our sins superficially.

Lord, all my desire is before You;  
And my sighing is not hidden from You.

For I confess my iniquity;  
I am full of anxiety because of my sin.

4. In v.21 – 22, David asks God not to forsake him. Was this a real possibility?
  - a. I don't think so. Because God anointed David with the Holy Spirit to be king. And the narrator of the Book of Samuel – who compiled the book at the end of David's actual reign as king – said, "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). So that means the Spirit of God did not forsake David. Even when David sinned with Bathsheba and Uriah and wrote Psalm 51.
  - b. What does "salvation" mean in this context (v.22)? It means to be delivered from enemies into safety. David still trusts God to protect him and vindicate him as the true king. It will happen soon.