

The Consequences of Sin; the Shortness of Life

Psalms 38-39

Psalm 38:1-12 – *“O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin.*

For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly. I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken. I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.

Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off. Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception all the day long.”

Background Notes for Psalm 38

Psalm 38 is one of the seven penitential psalms. It emphasizes the consequences of sin. It could be entitled a “Song of Sorrow” - sorrow because of the consequences of sin. Psalm 38 is read yearly by Jewish people in synagogues around the world on the Day of Atonement.

The title of Psalm 38 tells us that David is the author, and that it is a memorial, or a call to remember. It doesn't take much insight to see that it was David's sin that is to be remembered. Clearly David was suffering the consequences of some sin in his life.

David was probably not referring to his sin with Bathsheba, because the consequences mentioned here are different than the four consequences that the prophet Nathan pronounced after David's sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12). It has been suggested that his sin mentioned in Psalm 38 was his glaring failure to discipline his family when David's son Amnon raped and cast aside David's daughter, Tamar, and when David's son Absalom subsequently murdered his half-brother Amnon.

We don't know that what was the occasion for this psalm, but in any case Psalm 38 describes for us the consequences of serious sin.

Doctrinal / Teaching Point for Psalm 38

Believers should acknowledge the fact that there are consequences to sin.

In verses 1-12 we see that David was suffering both in body and spirit. It's as if God, in His anger, was shooting painful arrows into David's body and pressing His hand down hard on him (v2). His body was wracked with weakness, pain, and fever (v5-8). David knew that his condition was the result of God's discipline (v3-4). But he knew that God knew! His pain was not hidden from God, and that knowledge gave David hope in the midst of his brokenness, loneliness, and the threats on his life (v9-12).

Psalm 38:13-22 - *"But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute who does not open his mouth. Thus I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no response.*

For in You, O LORD, I hope. You will hear, O Lord my God. For I said, "Hear me, lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they exalt themselves against me." For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me, for I will declare my iniquity. I will be in anguish over my sin. But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong, and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied. Those also who render evil for good are my adversaries, because I follow what is good.

Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!"

In these verses, we see David's determination not to try to make excuses for his sins, or to try to vindicate himself in any way. But rather he wanted to confess his sin and leave everything in the hands of God - and as a result to be restored to fellowship with the Lord.

Believers should acknowledge the fact that there are consequences to sin.

Practical Application for Psalm 38

Expect to be lonely when you sin.

"My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off" (v11). God forgives us our sins when we repent and confess our sin, but there are consequences to sin, and loneliness is one of the consequences. David's family and friends shunned him because of his bodily condition.

But even if you are not physically sick (as this psalm describes), you will be lonely when you sin. Yes, you'll have surface friendships with people who may be involved with your sin. But when all is said and done, you will be lonely **until you are restored to fellowship with the Lord** after you repent and confess your sin.

So - expect to be lonely when you sin.

Psalm 39 - *“I said, “I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue. I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.” I was mute with silence. I held my peace even from good, and my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me. While I was musing, the fire burned.*

Then I spoke with my tongue: “LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You. Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah

Surely every man walks about like a shadow. Surely they busy themselves in vain. He heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them. “And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the reproach of the foolish.

I was mute; I did not open my mouth. Remove Your plague from me. I am consumed by the blow of Your hand. When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth. Surely every man is vapor. Selah “Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry. Do not be silent at my tears, for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more.”

Background Notes for Psalm 39

Psalm 39 is clearly related to Psalm 38 and may have been written by David at about the same time - perhaps as a sequel. The emphasis in Psalm 39 is on the shortness of life. This emphasis on the brevity of life emerges because David is under the hand of God and experiencing disciplinary sickness. *“Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand. When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth. Surely every man is vapor. Selah” (v10-11).*

So Psalms 38 and 39 are closely related and may have been written by David around the same time. From the title we see that Psalm 39 was written for the chief musician, Jeduthun. He was one of the choir directors appointed by David to lead public worship.

Doctrinal / Teaching Point for Psalm 39

Believers should accept the fact that life is short.

Notice the emphasis in this psalm on the brevity of life.

In verses 4-5: *“LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You. Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah* A handbreadth, by the way, is only four fingers wide.

And verse 6: *“Surely every man walks about like a shadow. Surely they busy themselves in vain. He heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.*

And verse 11: *“When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth. Surely every man is vapor. Selah”*

In verses 1-3, David was determined not to complain, or mouth off, or defend himself about God's sovereign ways in his life in public. He especially didn't want to complain when the wicked were listening, because they would find fault with God's ways.

But in verses 4-6, David vents his frustrated feelings **before the Lord**. *"O LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am" (v4)*. In this verse, David is not praying that the Lord would reveal to him how he would die, or how much time he had left, but rather that the Lord would help him appreciate the brevity of human life. This is something we all need to consider and appreciate.

The end of verse 6 has a powerful message for all of us. *"He heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them."* Think about this: if you don't use your money for the Lord while you're living, and if you don't leave it for the Lord's work after you die, you don't know how it will be used - or squandered when you're gone!

In verses 7-13, David acknowledges that his suffering was God's righteous discipline, therefore David would guard what he said. But he did request relief from God's heavy hand, so that unbelievers would not gloat over his situation. *"Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish" (v8)*.

And he requested relief so that he would no longer be like a stranger to God, so that he could smile again, and so he could enjoy his final years of life. *"Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry. Do not be silent at my tears, or I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more" (v12-13)*. David was seventy years old when he died. Believers should accept the fact that life is short.

Practical Application for Psalm 39

Live as if you only had six more months!

What would you **do** if the Lord told you that you had only six more months to live? Would you witness to your neighbor? Would you get more active in Christian service? Would you spend more time in Bible study and prayer? Would you up your Christian giving?

What would you **stop doing** that you do now? With whom would you try to reconcile? Who would you forgive? Would you try to be more kind and loving in your family and at work?

A good indication that you're living the right way as a Christian now is that you wouldn't have to make any changes. So live as if you only had six more months!