

Psalm 38: God, do not forsake me



Psalm 38 (37) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4...271)

Along with Psalms 6, 32, 51, 102, 130 and 143, this is numbered among the penitential psalms. The psalmist has sinned (verses 3-4 and 18), but cries out to God not to leave him in such terrible physical and mental anguish. He assumes, according to the mentality of the time, that suffering is willed by God, and therefore must be a form of punishment for sin. He asks forgiveness, but insists that those who are maligning him are acting unjustly (verses 19-20).

Lord, rebuke me, but not in your anger;
discipline me, but not in your wrath.

= Psalm 6:1

Your arrows have struck me,
your hand is heavy upon me.

There is no part of my flesh that is not wounded
because of your indignation.

There is no sound bone in my body
because of my sin.

Yes, my guilty deeds overwhelm me;
they are a burden too heavy to bear.

My wounds grow foul and fester
because of my folly.

‘From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds;
they have not been drained, or bound up,
or softened with oil’(Isaiah 1:6).

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all day long I go mourning.
My frame is burning with fever.
No part of my body is free from pain.
I am utterly spent and crushed.
I groan because of the anguish in my heart.
Lord, you know all my longing;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

He is confident that in spite of his sin God knows that his deepest yearning is for communion with God, and so he pleads for forgiveness.

My heart pounds, my strength is spent;
the light of my eyes – it, too, has gone.
Friends and neighbours avoid me,
keeping their distance.

‘He has put my family far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My relatives and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving girls count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must myself plead with him. My breath is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family. Even young children despise me; when I rise, they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me’(Job 19:13-19).

Those who seek my life lay snares for me.
Those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin.
They think up treachery
all the day long.

Like the deaf who cannot hear,
like the dumb unable to speak,
I can no longer hear,
I have no words for my defence.

In you, Lord, I hope;
you will answer for me, Lord, my God.

‘It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
It is good to bear the yoke in youth,
to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it,
to put one’s mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),
to give one’s cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.
For the Lord will not reject forever’(Lamentation 3:26-31).

They are gloating over me,
those who make fun of me when I stumble.
I am on the point of collapsing,
there is no relief from my pain.

I confess that I am guilty.

My sin fills me with dismay.

My enemies are strong.

Many are those who hate me for no reason.

Those who render me evil for good
attack me for seeking what is right.

Do not forsake me, Lord.

O my God, do not be far from me.

Make haste, come to my help,

O Lord, my God, my saviour.