

Psalm 39

To the chief Musician, [even] to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 39: “Jeduthun” (superscription), was probably Ethan, the well-known director of the temple choir (see the notes on 1 Chron. 6:31-48). The psalm is composed of three key parts. First, the psalmist suppresses his complaint to God until he can contain it no longer (verses 1-3). Second, when he can contain himself no more, he utters his cry of distress, centering in the innate frailty of man which he feels at present so acutely (verses 4-11). Finally, he presents his petition to God, who will certainly regard his tears and spare him (verses 12-13).

Verses 1-13: Psalm 39 is an exceptionally heavy lament (which compares with Job 7 and much of Ecclesiastes). It also carries on the here-today-gone-tomorrow (emphasis of Psalm 37), with a new twist, an application to all men, especially the psalmist. In this intense lament, David will break his initial silence with two rounds of requests and reflections about the brevity and burdens of life.

- I. Introduction: David’s Silence (39:1-3).
- II. Round One: The Brevity and Burdens of Life (39:4-6).
 - A. His Request for Perspective (39:4);
 - B. His Reflections on Perspective (39:5-6).
- III. Round Two: The Brevity and Burdens of Life (39:7-13).
 - A. His Reflection on Hope (39:7);
 - B. His Requests and Reflections on Providence (39:8-11);
 - C. His Requests for Relief (39:12-13).

Title: “To Jeduthun”: This is most likely a specifically designated worship director (compare 1 Chron. 9:16; 16:37; 25:1-3; Neh. 11:17).

Psalm 39:1 "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me."

“I will ... I will”: The form of these expressions intimate strong volitional commitments.

“Sin not with my tongue”: This sinning could have been in one or both of two ways:

- (1) Directly, by criticizing God for not bringing retribution on the wicked; and
- (2) Indirectly, by complaining in the hearing of the wicked.

David was not the only one who committed sin with his tongue. The tongue is like a weapon that cuts into the very soul of man. I would say, that more damage has been done with tongues than has been done in all the wars combined.

James 3:6 "And the tongue [is] a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

James 3:8 "But the tongue can no man tame; [it is] an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

No, man cannot tame his tongue. Both of these Scriptures above tell us why it is important for Christians to turn their tongue over to God. We cannot tame our tongue, but God can. Notice in the following Scriptures how God cleans up the speech of Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:6-7 "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:" "And he laid [it] upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

I would ask you one question; have you allowed the fire of God to touch your tongue and cleanse your speech?

Psalm 39:2 "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, [even] from good; and my sorrow was stirred."

His silence did not ease his pain; it seemed to make it all the worst.

David is really saying here perhaps, if I just don't talk at all, I will not sin with my tongue. He determines not to say anything, good or bad. This not speaking, did not stop his heart from hurting.

Psalm 39:3 "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: [then] spake I with my tongue,"

Compare Jeremiah's predicament (in Jer. 20:9).

"Then spake I with my tongue": Contrast the silence (of verse 1). Yet, he did not violate the conditions of his original commitment, since he did not vent before men, but unloaded his burdens before God (compare verse 4).

Probably one of the worst things a person can do (for their own feelings), is to bottle things up inside. Sometimes if we can just tell someone, it helps us. This bottling up of his feelings made it seem as if there were a fire burning in his heart.

Verses 4-5: A "handbreadth" is the measure from the thumb to the little finger. Because every person's time on earth is short (90:7-12), God's people invest their days so they will count for eternity.

Psalm 39:4 "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it [is; that] I may know how frail I [am]."

For similar prayers about the brevity and burdens of life (compare Job 6:11; 7:7; 14:13; 16:21-22; Psalm 90:12; Eccl. 2:3).

The fact that David called God LORD is a step in the right direction. David is aware that God knows what his end will be. David is asking God, am I to die in my sin, or will I have a better end? He is telling God that he is weak within himself. He knows he cannot depend on his own goodness. Does this strike home? We have all felt like this sometime in our life. LORD, why am I living? Can I not be of some use to you on this earth? God am I going to die in my sin? Of course God knows the answer to our questions. God sent us a Savior, Jesus Christ the righteous. I may be frail within myself, but I do not have to depend on myself, I depend on Jesus.

Psalm 39:5 "Behold, thou hast made my days [as] a handbreadth; and mine age [is] as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state [is] altogether vanity. Selah."

“Handbreadth”: He measures the length of his life with the smallest popular measuring unit of ancient times (1 Kings 7:26); compare “four fingers” (i.e., about 2.9 inches in Jer. 52:21).

“And mine age is as nothing before thee”: On “measuring” God’s age (compare 90:2).

“Vanity”: For the same Hebrew word (compare Eccl 1:2), “vanity” (a total of 31 occurrences of this term are in Eccl; Psalm 144:4). On the concept in the New Testament (compare James 4:14).

Every person past 50 years of age will agree with David that this life is as a handbreadth. Even if you live to be a 100, this life is like a vapor. It is here today and gone tomorrow. It really does not matter whether you are wealthy and have great world power, or not. When God says it is over, it is over. Why then, are men so vain to want all this world power and wealth? It is very short lived. If this life is all that there is, it is a waste of time. Praise God! We are preparing for all of eternity in heaven. We should have our eyes fixed on the eternal life, and not this temporary one we are existing in here. “We are in this world, but not of this world”, if we are a believer in the Lord. We should be eagerly awaiting the trumpet blow when we can go home with Jesus.

Psalm 39:6 "Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up [riches], and knoweth not who shall gather them."

“Surely every man walketh in a vain show”: On the futility and irony of this phenomenon (compare Job 27:16), in context (Eccl. 2:18-23; Luke 12:16-20).

All of the trophies you have won here on the earth, whether it is money or importance, will remain on the earth when you die. You cannot take your big car and your big house with you. Someone else will live in your house and drive your car, and spend the money you made.

Psalm 39:7 "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope [is] in thee."

Look for, or expect, in this view of things? Not long life, since the days of man are so short, and his age as nothing. Not help from man, since he is altogether vanity. Not riches and honor, since they are such poor, fading, perishing things. But the glories of another world, and the enjoyment of the Lord himself, both in this and that.

"My hope is in thee": The psalmist now returns to himself, and comes to his right mind, and to a right way of judging and acting. Making the Lord the object of his hope and trust, expecting all good things, grace and glory, alone from him. And this is the hope which makes not ashamed.

Here is the answer. My hope is in thee. Lay all of the things of this world down and live for Jesus. How sad the rich young ruler loved the material things of this world so much that he traded eternal life for material wealth.

Psalm 39:8 "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish."

Recognizing, as in (Psalm 38:3-5), his sins as the source of all his troubles and sorrows. If his transgressions were forgiven, he felt assured that his trouble would be removed. His first petition therefore, is that his sins might be pardoned. With the implied conscious assurance that then it would be consistent and proper for God to remove his calamity, and deliver him from the evils which had come upon him.

"Make me not the reproach": Let not their prosperity and my misery give them occasion to deride and reproach me for my serving of thee, and trusting in thee, to so little purpose or advantage.

"Of the foolish": i.e. of wicked men, who though they profess and think themselves to be wise, yet indeed are fools. As is manifest from their eager pursuit of fruitless vanities (Psalm 39:6). And from their gross neglect of God, and of his service, who only is able to make them happy.

Just as God sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt (symbolic of the world), He will deliver David. This is not limited to the Old Testament. God sent Jesus Christ (His only Begotten Son), to deliver you and me. Jesus not only delivered us from hell and the grave, but delivered us from our sins as well.

Psalm 39:9 "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst [it]."

This refers either to his former silence, before he broke it (Psalm 39:1), or to what he after that came into again. When he had seen the folly of his impatience, the frailty of his life, the vanity of man, and all human affairs, and had been directed to place his hope and confidence in the Lord (Psalm 39:5). Or to the present frame of his mind, and his future conduct, he had resolved upon. And may be rendered, "I am dumb"; or "will be dumb, and will not open my mouth"; that is, not in a complaining and murmuring way against the Lord. But be still and know or own that He is God (compare verses 1-2).

"Because thou didst it": Sent this chastisement: meaning, probably, either first, the rebellion and untimely death of Absalom; in which he acknowledged the just hand of God, punishing his sins. Or second, some other affliction.

In this verse, the terminology of (Psalms 38:13; 39:2), reappears and accompanied by the theology of (Job 42).

David is cleansed of sin. He is without speech, because God has done this for him. David had no words to explain how God purged him from his sin.

Psalm 39:10 "Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand."

The psalmist still considers his affliction as coming from the hand of God, as his stroke upon him, and which lay as a heavy burden on him. And which God only could remove. And to him he applies for the removal of it, who is to be sought unto by his people to do such things for them. Nor is such an application in any way contrary to that silence and patience before expressed.

"I am consumed by the blow of thine hand": Meaning either that his flesh was consumed by his affliction, which came from the hand of God, or he should be consumed if he did not remove it. He could not bear up under it, but must sink and die. If he continued to strive and contend with him, his spirit would fail before him, and the soul that he had made. And therefore, he entreats he would remember he was but dust, and remove his hand from him. For this is a reason enforcing the preceding petition.

We see a prayer of thanksgiving from David. He is saying that with just one blow of your hand, you could destroy me. You have removed the blow of your hand against me.

Psalm 39:11 "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man [is] vanity. Selah."

"Like a moth": The moth normally represented one of the most destructive creatures, but here the delicacy of the moth is intended (compare Job 13:28; Isa. 50:9; 51:8; Matt. 6:19).

God is not impressed with colorful clothes and great jewels, when we stand before HIM. The High Priest, when he went in to the Holy of Holies to represent the people to God, wore nothing but white linen garments. He did not wear any jewels or fine clothing. We have nothing to offer to God. The garments the High Priest wore represented the garments Jesus has clothed all the Christians in. These white linen garments represent the garments of the saints, which have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and made white. The beauty that man has before God, is the righteousness that the Lord Jesus clothed them in. The man without this garment that Jesus provides all who believe, is filthy rags.

“Selah”: In this case would mean think on these things.

Psalm 39:12 "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I [am] a stranger with thee, [and] a sojourner, as all my fathers [were]."

“Stranger ... sojourner”: He considers himself to be a temporary guest and squatter in the presence of God; on the terminology (compare Lev. 25:23; Deut. 24:19; 1 Chron. 29:15; Psalm 119:19); and for the concept in the New Testament (compare Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11).

David is saying, this land is not my home. I am looking for a city whose maker is God. I am just passing through this way. My father and grandfathers passed this way too. This was not their home either. David is telling God that he has spoken of his sins, now please forgive him and let him live.

Psalm 39:13 "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more."

Or, cease from me, i.e. from afflicting me. Do not destroy me. My life at best is but short and miserable, as I have said, and thou knowest. Sufficient for it is the evil thereof. Do not add affliction to the afflicted.

"That I may recover strength": Both in my outward and inward man. Both which are much weakened and oppressed. Or, that I may be refreshed, or comforted. Eased of the burden of my sins, and thy errors consequent upon them, and better prepared for a comfortable and happy dissolution.

"Before I go hence": Out of this world by death.

"And be no more": The Psalmist, no longer anxious for death, but still expecting it, requests of God, in conclusion, a breathing-space, a short time of refreshment and rest. Before he is called on to leave the earth and "be no more ", i.e. bring his present state of existence to an end. This stark request is parallel in its intention (with verse 10).

David is speaking of his death to this world when he says, before I go hence. His being no more is speaking of the fact that he will be no more in this world. David wants to be assured that God has forgiven him before he dies. All of us are facing death to this world. Our body is of the dust of the earth, and to dust it will return. Praise God! My spirit body will live on.

1 Corinthians 15:44 "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

My natural body must die that my spirit body can inherit eternal life.

Psalm 39 Questions

1. David said he would take heed to his ways, that he might not sin with his _____.
2. How was he planning to keep his mouth?
3. What is the tongue called in James 3:6?
4. Who can tame the tongue?
5. How did God clean up the speech of Isaiah?
6. Have you allowed the fire of God to touch your tongue?
7. What is David really saying in verse 2 of the lesson?
8. Probably, one of the worst things a person can do (for their own feelings), is to _____ things _____ inside.
9. What are some of the questions we have all asked God about our life?
10. Who is the Savior of all believers?
11. What one word did David use to show the shortness of life in verse 5?
12. Who will agree with David that this life is very short?
13. What should we have our eyes fixed upon, besides the wealth of this world?
14. What happens to a man's riches when he dies?
15. Where did David place his hope?
16. Who did God send to deliver Israel from Egypt?
17. Where is Egypt symbolic of?
18. Who did God send to deliver you and me?
19. What did He deliver us from?
20. Why did the High Priest wear linen garments, very plain when he represented us before God?
21. How have the saints' white linen garments been made white?
22. What does Selah mean in verse 11?
23. What is David saying in verse 12?
24. What does David mean, when he says, before I go hence?

25. Where do we find the Scripture in the Bible that tells us we have a spiritual body, as well as a physical body?