

Psalm 39

"David's Plaintive Request for Yahweh to Remove His Discipline for His Sins before He Dies"

For the choir director, for Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

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A1 DAVID'S SELF-ENFORCED SILENCE CONCERNING THE SUCCESS OF THE WICKED 39:1-3

B1 His Resolve to be Silent so that He Will Not Sin 39:1

C1 So that he will not sin with his speech: {1} I said, "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue;

C2 So that he will not comment about the wicked before him: I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked ¹ are in my presence."

B2 His Silence Even Regarding Good: {2} I was mute and silent, I refrained *even* from good, ² And my sorrow grew worse. 39:2

B3 His Increasing Difficulty in Maintaining Silence: {3} My heart was hot within me, While I was musing the fire burned; *Then* I spoke with my tongue: 39:3

A2 DAVID'S REFLECTION ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE 39:4-6

B1 His Request for Yahweh to Help Him Comprehend His Own Transience 39:4

C1 {4} "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days;

C2 Let me know how transient I am.

¹ 39:1 - wicked: Apparently David was wanting to refrain from criticizing aloud the success and ease of the wicked in contrast to the misery of the righteous.

² 39:2 - from good: a word combining the Heb. prep. from (*min*) and adj. good (*towb*, 2896): K & D translate thus: "I was dumb in silence, I held my peace taking no note of prosperity," etc. Most translations to which I have access, such as NIV, KJV, NASB, etc., translate Ps. 39:2 in this fashion: "I was mute and silent, I refrained *even* from good," etc. There are apparently seven occurrences of the preposition *min* (from) prefixing *towb* (good). In Gen. 31:24 and 29, Laban is to speak neither good nor bad to Jacob; Zech. 1:17 "My cities shall again overflow with prosperity;" Ps. 39:2 (under consideration); in Ps. 52:5 *min* is obviously used as a comparison, "you love evil more than good;" Eccles. 4:8 "for whom ... am I depriving myself of pleasure?" Eccles. 6:3 "if he does not enjoy life's good things . . ." My belief is that the translations of NIV, KJV, NASB are to be preferred over K & D for two reasons: (1) The contexts of Gen. 31:24 and 29, both include speaking, or more precisely, *not* speaking, and refer to speaking good *words* rather than to commenting regarding a more abstract *prosperity*. Ps. 39:2 falls into this category and should be similarly translated. (2) The meaning assigned by K & D is really *with reference to*, as "I held my peace *with reference to* prosperity. Acc. to BDB, the preposition *min* is not used denoting *with reference to*. In my opinion, the preposition $\bar{\text{ל}}$ is the more likely preposition if that were the sense meant by David. K & D are over-reaching in their translation. The NASB translation is to be preferred -- David was going to be so silent that he would not say anything good, much less anything evil.

B2 His Realization of the Brevity of Life 39:5

- C1 Of His Own Life: {5} "Behold, You have made my days *as* handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;
- C2 Of the Life of Every Man: Surely every man at his best is a mere breath.

B3 His Contemplation That Man Briefly Amasses Wealth for Others to Enjoy 39:6

- C1 Man Appears on the Stage of Life as a Vanishing Phantom: {6} "Surely every man walks about as a phantom;
- C2 Life is Futile: Surely they make an uproar for nothing;
- C3 Others Enjoy the Fruit of One's Labor: He amasses *riches* and does not know who will gather them.

A3 DAVID'S TURNING TO GOD AS HIS ONLY HOPE 39:7-13

B1 His Hope in Adonai: {7} "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You. 39:7

B2 His Request for Forgiveness and To Be Kept from Being a Poor Testimony in front of the Wicked 39:8

- C1 {8} "Deliver me from all my **transgressions**;
- C2 Make me not the reproach of the foolish.

B3 His Growing Silence: {9} "I have become mute, I do not open my mouth, Because it is You who have done *it*. 39:9

B4 His Anguished Reflection on Yahweh's Discipline 39:10-13

- C1 His Request for God to Ease Up on His Discipline 39:10
 - D1 His request: {10} "Remove Your plague from me;
 - D2 His reason: Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.
- C2 His Complaint That God's Discipline is so Heavy He is About to Give Up 39:11
 - D1 {11} "With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity;
 - D2 You consume as a moth what is precious to him;
 - D3 The fragility and transience of man: Surely every man is a mere breath.

- C3 His Request for Yahweh to Listen to His Tearful Pleading 39:12
- D1 {12} "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry;
 - D2 Do not be silent at my tears;
 - D3 His reason: For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner like all my fathers.
- C4 His Request for Yahweh to Lift His Rebuking Scrutiny That David Might Smile Again Before He Dies 39:13
- D1 {13} "Turn Your gaze away from me,
 - D2 that I may smile *again* Before I depart and am no more."

A4 ADDENDUM

B1 Interpretation. This is a psalm whose meaning is somewhat difficult to unravel. Apparently David had committed some sin or sins. He was experiencing God's heavy hand of discipline (39:9-11) and he feels himself distanced from God (39:12) and unable to bear God's stern disciplinary gaze upon him (39:13). His dilemma is compounded by the fact that the wicked before him were not apparently experiencing difficulty (39:1). Knowing that his own discipline from God is deserved because of his sin (39:1, 8, 11), he resolves to be silent about the apparent success and ease of the wicked (39:1-3). But he can maintain his silence no longer. In his pain and questioning he asks God to help him realize how short this life is (39:4-6). Presumably this would be some sort of solace to him as he contemplates the long view – that the righteous will ultimately be rewarded while the wicked will be punished – but he does not explicitly say that. Plaintively, he asserts that his only hope is in Yahweh (39:7), asks for deliverance from his sins (39:8), and asks God to desist in chastening him (39:10) because he is being stripped of that which is precious to him and life is too short for that (39:11). The psalm does not end in triumph, but in anguished pleading. David tearfully bemoans his alienation from God (39:12) and pathetically asks God to remove his disciplinary gaze from him that he may enjoy life before he dies (39:13).

B2 Comparison. Psalm 39 has some remarkable parallels to Psalm 38. In each, David speaks of his own sin or potential sin (39:1, 8, 11, cf. 38:3-4, 18), refers to God's discipline in each (39:10-13, cf. 38:1-12), even using in each the word "plague," (*nega'* 5061) (39:10, cf. 38:11), mentions using the same tactic of remaining silent in each (39:2, 9, cf. 38:13-14), and speaks of his sorrow in each (39:2, 12 cf. 38:6, 17).

Expanded Analysis of Psalm 39

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