

PSALM 39

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 39

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

Some take Jeduthun to be the name of a musical instrument, as Jarchi, on which, and others the first word of a song, to the tune of which, this psalm was sung, as Aben Ezra; though it seems best, with Kimchi and others, to understand it as the name of the chief musician, to whom this psalm was sent to be made use of in public service; since Jeduthun was, with his sons, appointed by David to prophesy with harps and psalteries, and to give praise and thanks unto the Lord, (~~<3164>~~1 Chronicles 16:41,42 25:1,3); he is the same with Ethan ^{f548}. The occasion of it is thought, by some, to be the rebellion of his son Absalom; so Theodoret thinks it was written when he fled from Absalom, and was cursed by Shimei; or rather it may be some sore affliction, which lay upon David for the chastisement of him; (see ~~<3919>~~Psalm 39:9,13); and the argument of the psalm seems to be much the same with that of the preceding one, as Kimchi observes.

Ver. 1. *I said*, etc.] That is, in his heart; he purposed and determined within himself to do as follows; and he might express it with his mouth, and so his purpose became a promise;

I will take heed to my ways; as every good man should; that is, to all his actions, conduct, and conversation: it becomes him to take heed what ways he walks in; that they are the ways of God, which he directs to; that they are the ways of Christ, which he has left an example to follow in; and that they are according to the word of God; that he walks in Christ, the way of salvation, and by faith on him; that he chooses and walks in the way of truth, and not error; and in all, the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; and in the path of holiness, in which, though fools, they shall not err: and it is also necessary that he should take heed that he does nothing, either by embracing error, or going into immorality, by which the ways of God, and Christ, and truth, are evil spoken of, blasphemed and reproached; and that he does not depart out of these ways, nor stumble, slip, and fall in them;

that I sin not with my tongue; which is a world of iniquity, and has a multitude of vices belonging to it; not only in profane men, but in professors of religion; whom it becomes to take heed that they sin not with it, by lying one to another, by angry and passionate expressions, by corrupt communication, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting, which are not convenient; by whispering, talebearing, backbiting, and by evil speaking one of another: particularly there are vices of the tongue, which the saints are liable to under afflictive providences, and seem chiefly designed here; such as envious expressions at the prosperity of others; words of impatience under their own afflictions, and murmurings at the hand of God upon them; such as these the psalmist determined, within himself, to guard against; in order to which he proposed to take the following method;

I will keep my mouth with a bridle: that is, bridle his tongue, that being an unruly member, and to be kept in with bit and bridle, like an unruly horse; (see ^{<3012>}James 1:26 3:2-5,8);

while the wicked is before me; or “against me”^{f549}; meaning either while Ahithophel and Absalom were conspiring and rebelling against him, and Shimei was cursing him, under which he behaved with great silence, calmness, and patience; (see ^{<1052>}2 Samuel 15:25,26 16:5-12); or while he had the flourishing condition of wicked men in his view, and was meditating on it; or rather, when anyone of them came to visit him in his affliction, he was determined to be wholly silent, that they might have no opportunity of rejoicing over him, nor of reproaching him, and the good ways of God: and indeed it is proper for the people of God to be always upon their guard, when they are in the presence of wicked men; and be careful what they utter with their lips, who watch their words to improve them against them, and the religion they profess.

Ver. 2. *I was dumb with silence*, etc.] Quite silent, as if he had been a dumb man, and could not speak; so he was before men, especially wicked men, and under the afflicting hand of God; (see ^{<1340>}Psalms 39:9); thus he put his resolution into practice;

I held my peace, [even] from good; that is, he said neither good nor bad: this expresses the greatness of his silence: he did not choose to open his lips, and say anything that was good, lest evil should come out along with it; though this may be considered as carrying the matter too far, even to a criminal silence; saying nothing of the affliction he laboured under as coming from the hand of God, and of his own desert of it; nor praying to

God for the removal of it, nor giving him thanks for his divine goodness in supporting him under it, and making it useful to him; though it seems rather to have respect to his silence concerning the goodness of his cause before men; he said not one word in the vindication of himself; but committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously. The Targum and Jarchi interpret it of his silence and cessation “from the words of the law”: he said nothing concerning the good word of God; which sense, could it be admitted, the words in (^{341B}Jeremiah 20:9); might be compared with these and the following;

and my sorrow was stirred; this was the issue and effect of his silence; his sorrow being pent up, and not let out and eased by words, swelled and increased the more; or the sorrow of his heart was stirred up at the insults and reproaches of his enemies, as Paul’s spirit was stirred up by the superstition and idolatry of the city of Athens, (^{417B}Acts 17:16).

Ver. 3. *My heart was hot within me*, etc.] Either with zeal for God; or rather with envy at the prosperity of wicked men, and with impatience at his own afflictions;

while I was musing the fire burned; not the fire of the divine word, while he was meditating upon it, which caused his heart to burn within him; nor the fire of divine love, the coals whereof give a most vehement flame, when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and the thoughts of it are directed by the Spirit of God to dwell in meditation on it; but the fire of passion, anger, and resentment, while meditating on his own adversity, and the prosperity of others;

[then] spake I with my tongue; and so broke the resolution he had made, (^{130B}Psalm 39:1); he spoke not for God, though to him; not by way of thankfulness for his grace and goodness to him, in supporting him under his exercises; but in a way of complaint, because of his afflictions; it was in prayer he spoke to God with his tongue, and it was unadvisedly with his lips, as follows.

Ver. 4. *Lord, make me to know mine end*, etc.] Not Christ, the end of the law for righteousness, as Jerom interprets it; nor how long he should live, how many days, months, and years more; for though they are known of God, they are not to be known by men; but either the end of his afflictions, or his, latter end, his mortal state, that he might be more thoughtful of that, and so less concerned about worldly things, his own external happiness, or

that of others; or rather his death; (see ^{<1861>}Job 6:11); and his sense is, that he might know death experimentally; or that he might die: this he said in a sinful passionate way, as impatient of his afflictions and exercises; and in the same way the following expressions are to be understood;

and the measure of my days, what it [is]; being desirous to come to the end of it; otherwise he knew it was but as an hand's breadth, as he says in (^{<1395>}Psalm 39:5);

[that] I may know how frail I [am]; or "what time I have here"; or "when I shall cease to be"^{f550}; or, as the Targum is, "when I shall cease from the world"; so common it is for the saints themselves, in an angry or impatient fit, to desire death; (see ^{<1875>}Job 7:15,16 ^{<1875>}Jon 4:8); and a very rare and difficult thing it is to wish for it from right principles, and with right views, as the Apostle Paul did, (^{<1023>}Philippians 1:23).

Ver. 5. *Behold, thou hast made my days [as] an handbreadth*, etc.] These words, with the following clause, are the psalmist's answer to his own inquiries; or rather a correction of his inquiry and impatience, showing how needless it was to ask such questions, and be impatient to die, when it was so clear and certain a case that life was so short; not a yard or ell (forty five inches), but an handbreadth, the breadth of four fingers; or at most a span of time was allowed to man, whose days are few, like the shadow that declineth, and the grass that withers; by which figurative expressions the brevity of human life is described, (^{<1901>}Psalm 102:11 103:15); and this is the measure made, cut out, and appointed by the Lord himself, who has determined the years, months, and days of man's life, (^{<1845>}Job 14:5);

and mine age [is] as nothing before thee; in the sight of God, or in comparison of his eternity; not so much as an handbreadth, or to be accounted as an inch, but nothing at, all; yea, less than nothing, and vanity; (see ^{<2407>}Isaiah 40:17); that is, the age or life of man in this world, as the word^{f551} used signifies; for otherwise the age or life of man, in the world to come, is of an everlasting duration; but the years of this present life are threescore and ten; ordinarily speaking; an hundred and thirty are by Jacob reckoned but few; and even a thousand years with the Lord are but as one day, (^{<1904>}Psalm 90:4,10);

verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. As vanity may signify sin, emptiness, folly, falsehood, fickleness, and inconstancy; for man is a very sinful creature, empty of all that is good; foolish as to the

knowledge of divine things; he is deceiving and deceived, his heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; and he is unstable in all his ways: he is “all vanity”^{f552}, as the words may be rendered; all that he has, or is, or is in him, is vanity; his body, in the health, beauty, and strength of it, is subject to change; and so are his mind, his memory, his judgment and affections, his purposes and promises; and so are his goods and estate, his riches and honours; yea, all the vanity that is in the creatures, that is, in the vegetable and sensitive creatures, yea, that is in the whole, world, is in him; who is a microcosm, a little world himself: and this is true of every man, even in his “best settled”^{f553} estate; when he stood the most firm, as the word used signifies; it is true of men of high and low degree, of the wise, knowing, and learned, as well as of the illiterate and ignorant, (~~f519~~ Psalm 62:9 ~~f502~~ Romans 1:21,22); even of those that are in the most prosperous circumstances, in the greatest ease and affluence, (~~f216~~ Luke 12:16-19); David himself had an experience of it, (~~f101~~ 2 Samuel 7:1 12:11); yea, this is true of Adam in his best estate, in his estate of innocence; for he was even then subject to change, as the event has shown; and being in honour, he abode not long; and, though upright, became sinful, and came short of the glory of God: indeed, the spiritual estate of believers in Christ is so well settled as that it cannot be altered; nor is it subject to any vanity.

Selah. (See Gill on “~~f392~~ Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 6. *Surely every man walketh in a vain show*, etc.] Or “in an image”^{f554}, not “in the image of the Lord”, as the Targum; in the image in which God created man, for that is lost; nor in that which is stamped on men in regeneration; for every man does not walk in that; rather in the image of fallen man, in which every man is born and walks: or “in a shadow”^{f555}; or like one; to which the days of man’s life are often compared, (~~f395~~ 1 Chronicles 29:15 ~~f421~~ Psalm 102:11 144:4); and who, for the most part, busies himself in shadowy and imaginary things; agreeably to all which the poet says^{f556},

“I see that we who live are nothing else but images, and a vain shadow.”

Some^{f557} interpret it of “the shadow of death”; and others^{f558} of “darkness” itself; and it fitly expresses the state of unregeneracy and darkness in which every man walks without the grace of God; and which will end in utter darkness, if that does not prevent it; and which is called “a walking in the vanity of the mind”, (~~f417~~ Ephesians 4:17). Here it seems rather to intend the

outward show, pomp, and grandeur of every great man; of emperors, kings, princes, nobles, and the great men of the world; which is all a vain show, a glittering appearance for a while, a glory that passeth away, and will not descend after them when laid in the grave, and oftentimes lasts not so long;

surely they are disquieted in vain; about vain things, as riches and honours, which are fickle and unstable; and sometimes in vain are all the carking cares and disquietude of the mind, and toil and labour of the body, which are here referred to, to obtain these things; some rise early, and sit up late, and yet eat the bread of sorrow; and if they gain their point, yet do not find the pleasure and satisfaction in them they promised themselves and expected;

he heapeth up [riches], and knoweth not who shall gather them: according to Jarchi, the metaphor seems to be taken from a man that has been ploughing and sowing, and reaping and laying up the increase of the field in heaps, and yet knows not who shall gather it into the barn, seeing he may die before it is gathered in; compare with this (²¹²¹⁶Luke 12:16-19); or the meaning is, when a man has amassed a prodigious deal of wealth together, he knows not who shall enjoy it, whether a son or a servant, a friend or a foe, a good man or a bad man, a wise man or a fool, (²¹²¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:18,19).

Ver. 7. *And now, Lord, what wait I for?* etc.] 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 honour, 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.

Ver. 8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions*, etc.] Which were the cause and occasion of all his distresses, inward and outward; and the deliverance prayed for includes a freedom from the dominion of sin, which is by the power of efficacious grace; and from the guilt of sin, which is by the application of the blood of Christ; and from obligation to punishment for it,

or deliverance from wrath to come, which is through Christ's being made a curse, and enduring wrath in the room and stead of his people; and from the very being of sin, which, though it cannot be expected in this life, is desirable: and the psalmist prays that he might be delivered from "all" his transgressions; knowing: that if one of them was left to have dominion over him, or the guilt of it to lie upon him, and he be obliged to undergo due punishment for it, he must be for ever miserable;

make me not the reproach of the foolish; of a Nabal; meaning not any particular person; as Esau, according to Jarchi; or Absalom, as others; but every foolish man, that is, a wicked man; such who deny the being and providence of God, make a mock at sin, and scoff at the saints: and the sense of the psalmist is, that the Lord would keep him from sinning, and deliver him out of all his afflictions, on account of which he was reproached by wicked men.

Ver. 9. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth*, etc.] This refers either to his former silence, before he broke it, (^{<4901>}Psalm 39:1,2), 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, (^{<4905>}Psalm 39:5-7); 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"^{f559}; that is, not in a complaining and murmuring way against the Lord, but be still, and know or own that he is God;

because thou didst [it]; not "because thou hast made me", as Austin reads the, words, and as the Arabic version renders them, "because thou hast created me"; though the consideration of God being a Creator lays his creatures under obligation as to serve him, so to be silent under his afflicting hand upon them; but the sense is, that the psalmist was determined to be patient and quiet under his affliction, because God was the author of it; for though he is not the author of the evil of sin, yet of the evil of affliction; (see ^{<4006>}Amos 3:6); and it is a quieting consideration to a child of God under it, that it comes from God, who is a sovereign Being, and does what he pleases; and does all things well and wisely, in truth and faithfulness, and in mercy and loving kindness: this some refer to the rebellion of Absalom, and the cursing of Shimei, (^{<1021>}2 Samuel 12:11 16:10,11); or it may refer to the death of his child, (^{<1022>}2 Samuel 12:22,23); or rather to some sore affliction upon himself; since it follows,

Ver. 10. *Remove thy stroke away from me*, etc.] 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 any ways 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.

Ver. 11. *When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity*, etc.] The psalmist illustrates his own case, before suggested, by the common case and condition of men, when God corrects them; which he has a right to do, as the Father of spirits, and which he does with rebukes; sometimes with rebukes of wrath, with furious rebukes, rebukes in flames of fire, as the men of the world; and sometimes with rebukes of love, the chastenings of a father, as his own dear children; and always for iniquity, whether one or another; and not the iniquity of Adam is here meant, but personal iniquity: and correction for it is to be understood of some bodily affliction, as the effect of it shows;

thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth; that is, secretly, suddenly, and at once; as a moth eats a garment, and takes off the beauty of it; or as easily as a moth is crushed between a man's fingers; so the Targum;

“he melts away as a moth, whose body is broken:”

the Vulgate Latin, Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, and so the metaphrase of Apollinarius, read, as a spider which destroys itself. The word rendered “beauty” takes in all that is desirable in man; as his flesh, his strength, his comeliness, his pleasantness of countenance, etc. all which are quickly destroyed by a distemper of the body seizing on it; wherefore the psalmist makes and confirms the conclusion he had made before:

surely every man [is] vanity; (see Gill on “~~1305~~ Psalm 39:5”);

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{
}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 12. *Hear my prayer, O Lord*, etc.] Which was, that he would remove the affliction from him that lay so hard and heavy upon him;

and give ear unto my cry; which shows the distress he was in, and the vehemency with which he put up his petition to the Lord;

hold not thy peace at my tears; which were shed in great plenty, through the violence of the affliction, and in his fervent prayers to God; (see ^{
}Hebrews 5:7);

for I [am] a stranger with thee; not to God, to Christ, to the Spirit, to the saints, to himself, and the plague of his own heart, or to the devices of Satan; but in the world, and to the men of it; being unknown to them, and behaving as a stranger among them; all which was known to God, and may be the meaning of the phrase “with thee”; or reference may be had to the land of Canaan, in which David dwelt, and which was the Lord’s, and in which the Israelites dwelt as strangers and sojourners with him, (^{
}Leviticus 25:23); as it follows here;

[and] a sojourner, as all my fathers [were]; meaning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their posterity; (see ^{
}Genesis 23:4 35:27 ^{
}Psalm 105:23); as are all the people of God in this world: this is not their native place; they belong to another and better country; their citizenship is in heaven; their Father’s house is there, and there is their inheritance, which they have a right unto, and a meetness for: they have no settlement here; nor is their rest and satisfaction in the things of this world: they reckon themselves, while here, as not at home, but in a foreign land; and this the psalmist mentions, to engage the Lord to regard his prayers, since he has so often expressed a concern for the strangers and sojourners in the land of Israel.

Ver. 13. *O spare me*, etc.] Or “look from me” ^{f560}; turn away thy fierce countenance from me; or “cease from me” ^{f561}, and let me alone”; as in (^{
}Job 10:20); from whence the words seem to be taken, by what follows:

that I may recover strength; both corporeal and spiritual:

before I go hence; out of this world by death:

and be no more; that is, among men in the land of the living; not but that he believed he should exist after death, and should be somewhere, even in heaven, though he should return no more to the place where he was; (see

<8100>Job 10:20,21), when a man is born, he comes into the world; when he dies, he goes out of it; a phrase frequently used for death in Scripture; so the ancient Heathens called death “abito”, a going away^{f562}.