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.


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.

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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 7 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, 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).