

# “THE PHANTOM OF THE VAIN SHOW”

## Psalm 39

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### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been frustrated by the brevity and futility of your life? The lack of accomplishments, the failures, the goals unattained, the heartaches, the pains, the troubles?

Moreover, have you ever been so upset, troubled, concerned about what is happening to you, how people are treating you, and how the Lord seems to be unavailable to help you out of your dilemma that you must express yourself or you will burst? Yet, you do not want to dishonor or blaspheme God, nor do you want to give unbelievers a chance to mock you or your God by complaining in front of them.

Then you can relate to David in Psalm 39.

Psalm 39 is truly one of the most beautiful Psalms:

It is the sorrowful complaint of a heart, not yet subdued to a perfect resignation, but jealous with a godly jealousy, lest it should bring dishonor upon its God, and longing for light from heaven to scatter its doubts” (P. 326)

The theme of this psalm is the frail and fleeting nature of man’s life, yet the Lord “assiduously disciplines” such a creature. We could compare this Psalm to Job 7, especially Job’s cry “let me alone, for my days are a breath. What is man that thou dost make so much of him?” (Job 7:16b, 17a). But David does not ask that question in an arrogant fashion, but with consistent loyalty (1) and faith (7). *The kind of question asked in this Psalm finds its complete answer that dispels any confusion in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that brought life and immortality to light.*

This psalm has 4 divisions:

The pent-up protest (1-3); this fleeting life (4-6); this dire discipline (7-11); this small petition (12-13).

**YOU MUST KNOW YOUR END AND LEARN TO PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD.**

Before we examine the psalm, let us first look at the title. There is one new item we have not seen before: Jeduthun. He was a Levite choir leader—one of three after Asaph and Heman—in the days of David and Solomon (I Chr. 25:3, 6; II Chr. 5:12; 35:13). His descendants formed one of the Temple choirs (I Chr. 16:42; 25:1, 3; II Chr. 29:14; Neh. 11:17). He is likely the same person as Ethan (I Chr. 15:19) and his name was probably changed to Jeduthun after arrangements were made at Gibeon for the sacred services (I Chr. 16). He is also called David’s seer, since musicians were said to “prophecy” in their music (II Chr. 35:15).

#### I. THE PENT UP PROTEST (1-3)

##### A. A muzzled tongue (1)

1. Lest I sin with it by saying something to reproach God’s name.
2. Lest I give wicked people a chance to deride God’s name or mock me further.

##### B. Bound up speech (2)

1. Three-fold emphasis: “dumb (bound up) with silence, silent. He restates this resolve in verse 9—“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth.”
  2. Nothing good resulted from my silence—it was to no avail.
  3. The only thing that increased was my pain.
- C. A heated heart (3)
1. The center of my thoughts, feelings deep within me **became hot**.
  2. The **fire was burning** during my musings/meditations.
- D. Released Speech (3b)—the tongue released and un-muzzled, the fire bursts forth.

*However, when David finally does speak, he does so with respect and patience.* His first prayer is that God would help him to effectively learn the lessons of the brevity of life. When he speaks he speaks to God and not to man.

II. THIS FLEETING LIFE (4-6, 11b, 12b) [cf. James 4:13-14; Mt. 6:19-21; Ps. 90:12]

This fact becomes the most significant emphasis of the psalm; David piles expression upon expression to convey his point. *Will we get the message?*

- A. “Make me to know my end”—end of my life, my time on earth (4)
- B. What the “measure of my days” is—they have a limit (only place in Scripture where “measure” is used in reference to length of one’s life—v. 4).
- C. How temporary, transitory I [very emphatic] am (4).
- D. God has made my days *to be measured* in mere handbreadths (5)
- E. My lifetime in God’s sight, before Him, is really **nothing**. (5)
- F. **Every man—standing firm, at his best—is ALL vapor, breath, vanity!** [This same word is used throughout Ecclesiastes many times!] (vv. 5c; 11c)
- G. Every man walks about in his daily activities AS A MERE IMAGE—an empty picture. An image is like something/someone else **but is not the real thing!** [cf. Gen. 1, 9,] KJV renders this as: *Every man walketh in a vain show*. NASB renders: “*Every man walks about as a phantom*.” (6)
- H. People “make an uproar, commotion, are boisterous” for mere **vapor, breath, vanity**—same word as v. 5. (6)  
**What is all this hustle, pomp, circumstance, fuss? For what?**
- I. People can heap up wealth, riches, possessions, and others will gather them—we can’t keep them! (6)
- J. Like a moth consumes clothes—slow, steady, sure, devastating—so does God consume **all that man desires—all that is precious to him, all that he takes pleasure in!** (11b)
- K. [Repeat] Every man is mere vapor, breath, vanity! (11)
- L. On this earth we humans are mere strangers, temporary residents, aliens, sojourners—we don’t really belong nor own anything nor can we remain! (12b)

*But despite all of these facts about our vain and temporary life, God still disciplines his children—sometimes severely?* [Help, I need relief!]

III. THIS DIRE DISCIPLINE (8, 9, 10, 11a)

- A. My sin has caused some of my problems—deliver me! (v. 8)

- B. Don't allow me or your name/reputation to bear reproach because of the foolish people (8b)
  - C. You have **done it**—what is happening to me is your work in my life—therefore I will keep quiet, not fight you, nor take it out on people around me as though it is their fault. You are trying to teach me some very important lessons! I must learn them. But, I seriously need help! (9b)
  - D. Please—“remove from me your “stroke/plague” (cf. 38:11). [whatever it is it is serious]
  - E. Your “blow, hostility” from your hand is **killing me**--I AM SPENT, ENDED, COME TO AN END! (10)
  - F. You do chasten men—esp. believers—for their iniquity, using your various **rebukes, corrections**. All that is necessary and good—but I don't think I can handle it any more! (11)
- Yes, David is in bad shape—but he knows where to go for help; so must we!*

IV. THIS SMALL PETITION (7, 12-13)

- A. *God is my **HOPE***; I wait for Him (7)
- B. *Hear my prayer*, O Lord; give ear to my cry! (12)
- C. *Please notice my tears*—don't be silent when you see them! (12)
- D. *Stop looking at me*—in noticing and punishing me for all my wrongs; I need relief and deliverance! (13)
- E. *I want to be able to smile again* (13).
- F. *Soon I will depart* this life and be no more in this world! (13)

CONCLUSION

Let's face it. We all have these kinds of pent up protests at times! When we do express them, we need to make sure not to sin and to take them to God Himself with the right attitude.

We must acknowledge the brevity and futility of our lives. Only what's done for Christ will last.

God does discipline us—let us accept discipline from Him and learn from it!

Through it all, let us find our **hope** in the Lord—he will enable you to smile again.

Soon you will depart this life and be no more.

**YOU MUST KNOW YOUR END AND LEARN TO PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD.**