

PSALM 39

The uncertain length of human life and the unsatisfactory nature of earthly pursuits appear to have been forcibly brought to the Psalmist's mind when he says, "My heart was hot within me." We are not told whether it were grief or sickness or some other cause that brought these vivid impressions. But what we are told will be sufficient as long as we take to heart the shortness of our own days.

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

- 1 I said, "I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, so long as the wicked are in my presence."
- 2 I was mute and silent; I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse.
- 3 My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:
- 4 "O YAHWEH, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!
- 5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah
- 6 Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;
man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

- 7 "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.
- 8 Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool!
- 9 I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it.
- 10 Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the hostility of your hand.
- 11 When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin,
you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath! Selah

- 12 "Hear my prayer, O YAHWEH, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears!
For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.
- 13 Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!"

PRAYER

Eternal God, who are without beginning or end of days, you have appointed for us a short portion of time in which to work for you. Grant that we may live as always dying, mortifying our souls and bodies and bridling our tongues and affections. Instead of heaping up riches on earth, let us have our treasure in heaven where it is laid up in store for us, when we shall dwell in those heavenly mansions prepared for us through the merits and sufferings of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.