

Psalms 39:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah.

Analysis

When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity—The Hebrew construction *bəṭôkâḥôṭ 'al-'āwōn 'îsh* (בְּתוֹכָחוֹת עַל-עוֹן אִישׁ) shows God using *tôkâḥāh* (rebuke/reproof) to address *'āwōn* (iniquity/guilt). This verse universalizes David's experience: all humanity faces divine correction for sin. The purpose isn't destruction but transformation—God as the wise father who disciplines wayward children (Proverbs 3:11-12, quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6).

Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth—The imagery is haunting. Tattemes *kā'āsh ḥāmûḏô* (תַּתֵּמֶס כָּאֵשׁ חָמוֹדוֹ, "thou makest melt away like a moth his desirableness") uses *māsas* (melt/dissolve) to describe how God's rebuke erodes *ḥemuḏ* (beauty/desirable things). The moth comparison is deliberate—moths silently, gradually destroy valuable garments. Sin's consequences similarly eat away at human glory, reducing strength and splendor to nothing. Job used similar language: "He breaketh me with breach upon breach" (Job 16:14).

Surely every man is vanity. Selah—*Ak ḥebēl kol-'ādām selāh* (אֲךָ הֶבֶל כָּל-אָדָם סֵלָה) *hebel* (אֲךָ, אַךְ—certainly, only) **every man** (*kol-'ādām*, כָּל-אָדָם—all humanity without exception) is **vanity** (*hebel*, הֶבֶל—vapor, breath, futility). *Selāh* marks a pause for meditation on this sobering truth. Human beauty, strength, accomplishments—all dissolve like moth-eaten fabric under divine scrutiny. This isn't nihilism but realism that drives us to find permanence in God alone. Jesus warned that life doesn't consist in abundance of possessions

(Luke 12:15), and James compared life to vapor that appears briefly then vanishes (James 4:14).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures often portrayed humans as having eternal glory or achieving immortality through great deeds. Israel's theology radically differed: only God possesses inherent glory and permanence; humanity's glory is borrowed, dependent, and temporary. This worldview prepared for the gospel: our only lasting glory comes through union with Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What 'beauty' or strength in your life are you treating as permanent when it's actually as fragile as moth-eaten fabric?
2. How does accepting that 'every man is vanity' free you from the exhausting pursuit of self-glory?
3. In what ways does God's rebuke for iniquity function as corrective love rather than vindictive punishment in your experience?

Interlinear Text

בְּתוֹכָהּ חַ וְתִ	עַל	עוֹן	יִסְרֹף	אִישׁ	וְתִמְסֹךְ
When thou with rebukes	H5921	for iniquity	dost correct	man	to consume away
H8433		H5771	H3256	H376	H4529
כְּעָשׂ	תַּמְדּוֹ	אֵל	הַבָּל	כָּל	אִם
like a moth	thou makest his beauty	H389	is vanity	H3605	surely every man
H6211	H2530		H1892		H120

קְלָה:

Selah

H5542

Additional Cross-References

Job 13:28 (Parallel theme): And he, as a rotten thing, consumeth, as a garment that is moth eaten.

Isaiah 50:9 (Parallel theme): Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

Revelation 3:19 (Parallel theme): As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Hebrews 12:6 (Parallel theme): For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

1 Corinthians 5:5 (Parallel theme): To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.