

Psalms 39:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

Analysis

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. This verse intensifies David's appeal through three escalating petitions: hear my prayer, give ear to my cry, and don't be silent at my tears. The progression from words (prayer) to sounds (cry) to silent tears reflects deepening anguish that transcends articulation. Romans 8:26 echoes this: 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'

'Hold not thy peace at my tears' (al techerash el dim'ati, אַל-תַּחַרְשׁ אֶל-דִּמְעָתִי) literally means 'don't be deaf to my tears.' David fears divine silence—that God might observe his suffering without responding. This fear appears throughout the psalms: 'Be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit' (Psalm 28:1). God's silence feels like abandonment, yet the very act of praying demonstrates faith that God can speak.

'For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner' (ki ger anoki immach toshav, כִּי-גֵר אֲנִי וְתוֹשָׁב) uses two terms for temporary residence. Ger (גֵּר) means foreigner, alien, temporary resident; toshav (תוֹשָׁב) means sojourner, dweller without permanent rights. David acknowledges his temporary status on earth—he's merely passing through, not permanently settled. This echoes Abraham who 'dwelt in the land of promise, as in a strange country... for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (Hebrews 11:9-10).

'As all my fathers were' (kechol avotai, כְּכָל־אֲבוֹתַי) grounds this in Israel's history. The patriarchs lived as nomads; Israel wandered forty years; even in the promised land they remained 'strangers and pilgrims' (1 Chronicles 29:15). This self-identification as sojourner shapes the prayer—David appeals to God as patron who protects vulnerable foreigners. Levitical law commanded special care for strangers (Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:33-34), and David invokes that divine characteristic.

Historical Context

Israel's identity as sojourners began with Abraham. God called him to leave his homeland and dwell as a foreigner in Canaan, a land he never fully possessed during his lifetime (Genesis 12:1, 23:4). Isaac and Jacob continued this nomadic existence, living in tents and moving frequently. The patriarchs' lives established a pattern: God's people are pilgrims on earth, citizens of a better country.

The exodus generation wandered forty years in wilderness—ultimate sojourning. They possessed no land, built no permanent structures, lived in temporary dwellings, and depended entirely on God's daily provision. This formative experience shaped Israel's self-understanding. Even after settling in Canaan, they were to remember: 'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me' (Leviticus 25:23).

Psalms 39's sojourner language resonates with exilic experience. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and deported Judah's leaders, they became literal foreigners in a strange land. Psalm 137 captures this anguish: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.' Exiles prayed as strangers, longing for home, dependent on God's mercy in foreign territory.

The New Testament explicitly develops pilgrimage theology. Hebrews 11:13 says the patriarchs 'confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,' and this characterizes all believers: 'Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come' (Hebrews 13:14). Peter addresses Christians as 'strangers and pilgrims' (1 Peter 2:11), and Paul teaches that 'our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven'

(Philippians 3:20). The church is God's pilgrim people, passing through this world toward the eternal city.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does viewing yourself as a 'stranger and sojourner' on earth affect your attachment to earthly possessions and status?
2. In what ways have you experienced prayers that move from words to cries to tears?
3. What does it mean practically that God hears and responds to tears, not just articulate prayers?
4. How should identifying as a pilgrim rather than permanent resident shape your priorities and investments?
5. What 'city with foundations' (Hebrews 11:10) are you ultimately seeking, and how does this affect present decisions?

Interlinear Text

שְׁמָעָה	תִּפְלֵת יְיָ	יְהוָה	וְשִׁוְעֵת יְיָ	הָאֲזִינָה	אֶל	דִּמְעֵת יְיָ	אֶל
Hear	my prayer	O LORD	unto my cry	and give ear	H413	at my tears	H408
H8085	H8605	H3068	H7775	H238		H1832	
חַבֵּשׁ	לֹא	יְיָ	אֲנִי	גֵר	אֶנִּי	עַמִּי	וְ
hold not thy peace	H3588	for I am a stranger	H595	H5973			
H2790		H1616					
וְ	אִשָּׁךְ	בְּכָל	אֲבוֹתַי				
with thee and a sojourner	H3605	as all my fathers					
H8453		H1					

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 11:13 (Parallel theme): These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Genesis 47:9 (Parallel theme): And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

Leviticus 25:23 (Parallel theme): The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.

1 Peter 2:11 (Parallel theme): Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

Psalms 56:8 (Parallel theme): Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

Psalms 119:19 (Parallel theme): I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

2 Kings 20:5 (Prayer): Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have

seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

1 Peter 1:17 (Parallel theme): And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

Psalms 116:3 (Parallel theme): The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.

Job 16:20 (Parallel theme): My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.

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