

Psalms 78:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

Analysis

For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again. While Israel forgot God (v. 42), God remembered Israel's frailty. Bāśār (בָּשָׂר, "flesh") denotes human weakness, mortality, and limitation—not sinfulness per se but creatureliness. God's mercy flows from recognizing His creatures' fragility, like a father pitying his children (Psalm 103:13-14).

The image of rūaḥ hōlēḵ wēlō' yāšûḇ (רוּחַ הוֹלֵךְ וְלֹא יָשׁוּב, "wind passing and not returning") captures human transience—breath here and gone. This isn't fatalism but realism about human limitations apart from divine sustenance. Like grass that withers (Isaiah 40:6-8), humanity needs God's enduring word and renewing Spirit.

God's remembrance of our weakness doesn't excuse sin but explains His patience. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve (Psalm 103:10) because He knows our frame. This grounds assurance: our perseverance depends on God's faithful remembrance, not our faithful performance. Christ, the eternal Word made flesh, secures this mercy forever.

Historical Context

The wilderness generation was literally dying—all who left Egypt over age 20 (except Caleb and Joshua) perished before Canaan entry (Numbers 14:29). Their mortality was both judgment and reminder of human frailty. Asaph reflects on God's patience with these dying rebels.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's awareness of your "flesh"—your human weakness—give you confidence to approach Him honestly?
2. In what ways do you forget your own frailty and judge others more harshly than God does?
3. How should the brevity of life ("wind that passeth away") shape your priorities and pursuit of God?

Interlinear Text

<p>וַיִּזְכֹּר</p> <p>For he remembered</p> <p>H2142</p>	<p>כִּי</p> <p>H3588</p>	<p>בָּשָׁר</p> <p>that they were but flesh</p> <p>H1320</p>	<p>וְהָיָה</p> <p>H1992</p>	<p>רֵיחַ</p> <p>a wind</p> <p>H7307</p>
<p>הָיָה וְלֹא</p> <p>that passeth away</p> <p>H1980</p>	<p>וְלֹא</p> <p>H3808</p>	<p>יָשׁוּב:</p> <p>and cometh not again</p> <p>H7725</p>		

Additional Cross-References

Job 7:7 (Parallel theme): O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good.

Genesis 6:3 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

James 4:14 (Parallel theme): Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Job 7:16 (Parallel theme): I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity.

Job 10:9 (Parallel theme): Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

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