

Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ps 39:7).

1. He prays to God to make him sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of life and the near approach of death (v. 4): *Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days*. He does not mean, "Lord, let me know how long I shall live and when I shall die." We could not, in faith, pray such a prayer; for God has nowhere promised to let us know, but has, in wisdom, locked up that knowledge among the secret things which belong not to us, nor would it be good for us to know it. But, *Lord, make me to know my end*, means, "Lord, give me wisdom and grace to consider it (Deu. 32:29) and to improve what I know concerning it." *The living know that they shall die* (Eccl. 9:5), but few care for thinking of death; we have therefore need to pray that God by his grace would conquer that aversion which is in our corrupt hearts to the thoughts of death. "Lord, make me to consider," (1.) "What death is. It is my end, the end of my life, and all the employments and enjoyments of life. It is the end of all men," Eccl. 7:2. It is a final period to our state of probation and preparation, and an awful entrance upon a state of recompence and retribution. To the wicked man it is the end of all joys; to a godly man it is the end of all griefs. "Lord, give me to know my end, to be better acquainted with death, to make it more familiar to me (Job 17:14), and to be more affected with the greatness of the change. Lord, give me to consider what a serious thing it is to die." (2.) "How near it is. Lord, give me to consider the measure of my days, that they are measured in the counsel of God" (the end is a fixed end, so the word signifies; *my days are determined*, Job 14:5) "and that the measure is but short: My days will soon be numbered and finished." When we look upon death as a thing at a distance we are tempted to adjourn the necessary preparations for it; but, when we consider how short life is, we shall see ourselves concerned to do what our hand finds to do, not only with all our might, but with all possible expedition. (3.) That it is continually working in us: "Lord, give me to consider how frail I am, how scanty the stock of life is, and how faint the spirits which are as the oil to keep that lamp burning." We find by daily experience that the earthly house of this tabernacle is mouldering and going to decay: "Lord, make us to consider this, that we may secure mansions in the house not made with hands."

2. He meditates upon the brevity and vanity of life, pleading them with God for relief under the burdens of life, as Job often, and pleading them with himself for his quickening to the business of life.

(1.) Man's life on earth is short and of no continuance, and that is a reason why we should sit loose to it and prepare for the end of it (v. 5): *Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth*, the breadth of four fingers, a certain dimension, a small one, and the measure whereof we have always about us, always before our eyes. We need no rod, no pole, no measuring line, wherewith to take the dimension of our days, nor any skill in arithmetic wherewith to compute the number of them. No; we have the standard of them at our fingers' end, and there is no multiplication of it; it is but one hand-breadth in all. Our time is short, and God has made it so; *for the number of our months is with him*. It is short, and he knows it to be so: *It is as nothing before thee*. he remembers *how short our time is*, Ps. 79:47. *It is nothing in comparison with thee*; so some. All time is nothing to God's eternity, much less our share of time.

(2.) Man's life on earth is vain and of no value, and therefore it is folly to be fond of it and wisdom to make sure of a better life. Adam is Abel—*man is vanity*, in his present state. He is not what he seems to be, has not what he promised himself. He and all his comforts lie at a continual

uncertainty; and if there were not another life after this, all things considered, he were made in vain. He is vanity; he is mortal, he is mutable. Observe, [1.] How emphatically this truth is expressed here. *First, Every man is vanity*, without exception; high and low, rich and poor, all meet in this. *Secondly*, He is *so at his best estate*, when he is young, and strong, and healthful, in wealth and honour, and the height of prosperity; when he is most easy, and merry, and secure, and thinks his mountain stands strong. *Thirdly*, He is *altogether vanity*, as vain as you can imagine. *All man is all vanity* (so it may be read); every thing about him is uncertain; nothing is substantial and durable but what relates to the new man. *Fourthly, Verily* he is so. This is a truth of undoubted certainty, but which we are very unwilling to believe and need to have solemnly attested to us, as indeed it is by frequent instances. *Fifthly, Selah* is annexed, as a note commanding observation. "Stop here, and pause awhile, that you may take time to consider and apply this truth, that every man is vanity." We ourselves are so. [2.] For the proof of the vanity of man, as mortal, he here mentions three things, and shows the vanity of each of them, v. 6. *First*, The vanity of our joys and honours: *Surely every man walks* (even when he walks in state, when he walks in pleasure) in a shadow, in an image, *in a vain show*. When he makes a figure his fashion passes away, and his great pomp is but great fancy, Acts 25:23. It is but a show, and therefore a vain show, like the rainbow, the gaudy colours of which must needs vanish and disappear quickly when the substratum is but a cloud, a vapour; such is life (Jam. 4:14), and therefore such are all the gaieties of it. *Secondly*, The vanity of our griefs and fears. *Surely they are disquieted in vain*. Our disquietudes are often groundless (we vex ourselves without any just cause, and the occasions of our trouble are often the creatures of our own fancy and imagination), and they are always fruitless; we disquiet ourselves in vain, for we cannot, with all our disquietment, alter the nature of things nor the counsel of God; things will be as they are when we have disquieted ourselves ever so much about them. *Thirdly*, The vanity of our cares and toils. Man takes a great deal of pains to *heap up riches*, and they are but like heaps of manure in the furrows of the field, good for nothing unless they be spread. but, when he has filled his treasures with his trash, he *knows not who shall gather them*, nor to whom they shall descend when he is gone; for he shall not take them away with him. He asks not, *For whom do I labour?* and that is his folly, Eccl. 4:8. but, if he did ask, he could not tell whether he should be a wise man or a fool, a friend or a foe, Eccl. 2:19. *This is vanity*.