

Psalms 49:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.

Analysis

The refrain (repeating v.12): 'Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.' The addition 'understandeth not' is key. Honor without wisdom equals animal existence. Understanding--the wisdom the psalm offers--distinguishes the truly human from the merely biological.

Historical Context

The refrain, slightly modified, emphasizes the psalm's central point. The repetition invites readers to internalize the truth: honor without understanding is bestial, not truly human.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What is the 'understanding' that distinguishes wise humans from beasts?
2. How does this wisdom psalm's conclusion challenge our values?

Interlinear Text

בָּהָם וֹת נָמָשׁ לְ כְּבָהָם וֹת נָמָשׁ לְ

מְאֻנָּה אֲנָה בְּ יִקְרָא אֲנָה בְּ יִקְרָא אֲנָה

Man that is in honour

H120

H3366

אֵל אֵל

H3808

וְיִמְשְׁלָל וְיִמְשְׁלָל

and understandeth

H995

וְאַתָּה וְאַתָּה

not is like

H4911

the beasts

H929

בְּדַבָּרִים:

that perish

H1820

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 49:12 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.

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