

Psalms 49:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.

Analysis

That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption. This verse concludes the psalmist's meditation on the futility of trusting in wealth to secure eternal life. The Hebrew vichi-le'olam od (וְיִחְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עוֹד, "that he should live forever still") expresses an impossible wish—that wealth could purchase immortality. The phrase lo-yireh hashachat (לَا יִרְאֶה הַשְׁחָתָה, "not see corruption") refers to bodily decay and death.

The context (verses 7-9) emphasizes that no one can pay a ransom sufficient to redeem their soul or prevent death: "For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever." The Hebrew word pidyon (פִּידּוֹן, "redemption/ransom") was used for payment to free slaves or captives. No amount of money can ransom a person from death itself.

This passage profoundly points to humanity's need for divine redemption. If wealth cannot purchase eternal life, then salvation must come through God's provision. The New Testament reveals Christ as the ultimate ransom (Mark 10:45, 1 Timothy 2:6), whose precious blood accomplishes what human wealth never could (1 Peter 1:18-19). This psalm exposes the fundamental limitation of material wealth and the absolute necessity of divine intervention for eternal life.

Historical Context

Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm addressing the universal human problem of mortality and the futility of trusting in wealth. The psalm's structure (verses 1-4 introduce a

riddle/proverb, verses 5-12 develop the theme, verses 13-20 apply the lesson) follows traditional wisdom literature patterns found in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel, wealth was often viewed as power that could solve any problem. The rich could buy freedom from slavery, protection from enemies, favorable legal judgments, and even temple sacrifices for atonement. The psalm's radical claim—that wealth cannot purchase life or prevent death—would have shocked its original audience.

Archaeological discoveries of elaborate tombs and grave goods from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan reveal the widespread belief that wealth could secure a favorable afterlife. Egyptian pharaohs were buried with treasures, food, and servants for the next world. The psalmist's declaration that death comes equally to rich and poor, wise and foolish (verse 10), directly contradicted these cultural assumptions. This psalm prepared Israel to understand that salvation requires God's gracious intervention, a truth fully revealed in Christ's redemptive work. Early Christians saw verse 15 ("But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave") as prophetic of resurrection through Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does our culture's pursuit of wealth and comfort reflect the same futile hope of avoiding death or securing life through money?
2. What does this verse teach about the limitations of human resources and the necessity of divine redemption?

3. How should the reality that wealth cannot prevent death or decay shape our priorities and use of resources?
4. In what ways does this psalm prepare us to understand Christ's work as the ultimate ransom for our souls?
5. How can we practically live with the wisdom that earthly wealth has no power over eternal matters?

Interlinear Text

וְיִתְּחַיֵּ	לֹא	לֹא	בְּשֹׁחַדְתָּ
That he should still live	for ever	and not see	corruption
H2421	H5750	H3808	H7200
H5331			H7845

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 89:48 (Parallel theme): What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

Psalms 16:10 (Parallel theme): For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

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