

Psalms 89:48

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

Analysis

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? (מַיְ גָּבָר יְחִיָּה וְלֹא יָרַא הַמֵּת) mi gever yichyeh velo yir'eh-mavet)—rhetorical question expecting the answer "none." Gever (man, mighty man) emphasizes even strong humans cannot escape death. **Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?** (יָמַלֵּט נַפְשׁוֹ מֵיָּהָרָה yemalet nafsho miyad-she'ol selah)—malat means to escape, slip away. Sheol (the grave, the realm of the dead) is personified as having a hand (yad) that grips the dying. The answer: no one escapes. "Selah" punctuates this grim reality.

The verse expresses universal mortality's despair. Psalm 49:7-9 echoes: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother...that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption." Without resurrection hope, death makes all promises futile. But Christ answers both rhetorical questions:

1. The God-man lived and did not remain dead (Acts 2:24: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death").
2. He delivers souls from Sheol's grip (Hosea 13:14: "O death, I will be thy plagues

O grave, I will be thy destruction"). Christ holds "the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18).

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's understanding of afterlife was shadowy (though not absent—see 1 Samuel 28; Isaiah 26:19). Exile intensified questions about death: Would God's people perish without seeing promises fulfilled? The answer awaited resurrection revelation. Christ's resurrection proved death isn't ultimate; martyrs could die in faith, knowing they'd rise (Hebrews 11:35: "that they might obtain a better resurrection").

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does mortality affect the urgency of God fulfilling His promises in your lifetime?
2. Without resurrection hope, would death make God's covenant promises meaningless? How does 1 Corinthians 15:19 relate?
3. How does Christ holding "the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18) answer this verse's despair?

Interlinear Text

וְבָרֵךְ	בָּרוּךְ	תְּחִי	אֵל	וְיִרְאָה	תְּנִתֵּן	תְּמִלֵּטָה
H4310	What man	is he that liveth	H3808	and shall not see	death	shall he deliver
H1397		H2421		H7200	H4194	H4422

נֶפֶשׁ	מִזְבֵּחַ	שָׁאַלְתָּה	סֶלָה
his soul	from the hand	of the grave	Selah

| H5315 | H3027 | H7585 | H5542 |

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 11:5 (Parallel theme): By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Psalms 49:15 (Parallel theme): But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

John 8:51 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

Acts 2:27 (Parallel theme): Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Job 30:23 (Parallel theme): For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (Parallel theme): Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 (Parallel theme): For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Psalms 22:29 (Parallel theme): All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 (Parallel theme): There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Hebrews 9:27 (Parallel theme): And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

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