



# The Riddle of Death

## Psalm 49

### INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 49

A. Note the repetition in Psalm 49:

- understanding
- redeem
- forever
- perish
- Sheol
- receive
- wealth

B. Psalm 49 is a Psalm of contrasts/antitheses:

- low and high (v.2a)
- rich and poor (v.2b)
- life and death
- wise and foolish; wise and stupid; wise and senseless
- understanding (v.3) and not understanding (v.20)
- the upright ruling over the foolish in the morning (v.14b) and the foolish will never see the light (v.19b)
- temporal homes versus the everlasting home in Sheol
- carrying/receiving nothing at death versus being received by God at death (vv.15,17)
- pomp and perishing
- glory and decay
- man and beasts (There's also a play on the Hebrew words for *wisdom* and *beasts*)

“[T]he more you appreciate the *poetry* of the psalms, the more you will get their *message*” (Mark Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, 24).

C. The Christian does not need to fear adversity, foes, or Sheol (vv.5,15-16). The non-Christian needs to fear even their prosperity (vv.12,20)!

Luke 12:4–5

<sup>4</sup>“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.

<sup>5</sup>“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

## PSALM 49 IS AN EVANGELISTIC RIDDLE FOR THE WORLD

- A. Psalm 49 is not against wealth. God created us to be wealthy! Rather, it is a riddle for those who do not worship the God who has answered the riddle of death: both low and high, rich and poor together.
- B. The expression of Psalm 49 on the harp is, to my understanding, part of the answer to the riddle.
1. Harps were part of the Old Covenant, Levitical priesthood, temple, and types and shadows of Christ (cf. 1 Chronicles 25:1).
  2. The use of the harp was *redemptive*.
    - a. “No man can by any means *redeem* his brother” (v.7a).
    - b. “Or give to God a *ransom* for him” (v.7b).
    - c. “But God will *redeem* my soul” (v.15a; cf. Psalm 31:5; 130:7-8).
  3. Jesus—the answer to this riddle—is the *Redeemer* (Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19). He is the fulfillment of what harps, the temple, the Levitical priesthood, and rest of the Old Covenant were anticipating.



knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,<sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18–19)

- C. Riddles were common in ancient times, almost like a traded commodity.
1. The Queen of Sheba travelled to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-34; 10:6-9).
  2. The riddles at Samson’s wedding feast (Judges 14).
  3. One of the oldest riddles found to date comes from the Sumerians and the ancient city of Ur (c. 1750 BC [time of Joseph]).
  4. The riddle of the Sphinx.
- D. Death is one of the greatest of all riddles!

## RIDDLES ARE A TYPE OF WISDOM (Psalm 49:3,14,20)

<sup>3</sup> My mouth will speak wisdom,                      And the meditation of my heart will be understanding.

<sup>20</sup> Man in his pomp, yet without                      Is like the beasts that perish.  
understanding ,

A. Wisdom is living your life in light of God's law, death, and judgment.

1. Some people spend their lives building bigger houses, forgetting that their dwelling will be in a \_\_\_\_\_ (v.11).
2. Some people try to live forever through their name (v.11).

B. Psalm 49 contains grim warnings for those who do not find the answer to the riddle of death.

1. Without understanding you are like \_\_\_\_\_ (v.14).
2. You will be shepherded by \_\_\_\_\_ (v.14; cf. Psalm 23).
3. Instead of grazing in green pastures you will be \_\_\_\_\_ (v.14).
4. Without understanding you are \_\_\_\_\_ (v.13).
5. Without understanding you will \_\_\_\_\_ (v.14).

*terminative terms* —

Psalm 1 —

Psalm 15 —

Psalm 48 —

Psalm 63 —

Psalm 88 —

Psalm 146 —

C. Summary of the riddle:

All people \_\_\_\_\_.

vv.6-9

v.11

v.12

## WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

- A. Some of the smartest and most powerful people have tried to answer the riddle of death (e.g. Pharaohs, Camus, Freud, Kurzweil).
- B. Psalm 49 teaches that the answer to the riddle of death comes from \_\_\_\_\_ (vv.7-8, 15).
1. Not all people have \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:3,5,9-10).
  2. God will \_\_\_\_\_ my soul (Psalm 49:15).
- C. The evangelistic purpose of Psalm 49 is that as we despair of our glory, wisdom and wealth, we must put our trust in Jesus Christ alone!

## APPLICATION

### YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED TO WATCH ONE MAN'S QUEST TO LIVE FOREVER:

*Transcendent Man: The Life and Ideas of Ray Kurzweil* (documentary);  
<http://transcendentman.com/>