

Israel's Hymnal
 Biblical Research Monthly
 October, 1947
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PSALM FORTY-NINE

[Pss 49:1] Hear this, all ye peoples; Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world,
 [Pss 49:2] Both low and high, Rich and poor together.
 [Pss 49:3] My mouth shall speak wisdom; And the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.
 [Pss 49:4] I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.
 [Pss 49:5] Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, When iniquity at my heels compasseth me about?
 [Pss 49:6] They that trust in their wealth, And boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;
 [Pss 49:7] None [of them] can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him;
 [Pss 49:8] (For the redemption of their life is costly, And it faileth for ever;)
 [Pss 49:9] That he should still live alway, That he should not see corruption.
 [Pss 49:10] For he shall see it. Wise men die; The fool and the brutish alike perish, And leave their wealth to others.
 [Pss 49:11] Their inward thought is, [that] their houses [shall continue] for ever, [And] their dwelling-places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names.
 [Pss 49:12] But man [being] in honor abideth not: He is like the beasts that perish.
 [Pss 49:13] This their way is their folly: Yet after them men approve their sayings. Selah
 [Pss 49:14] They are appointed as a flock for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; And the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; And their beauty shall be for Sheol to consume, That there be no habitation for it.
 [Pss 49:15] But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; For he will receive me. Selah
 [Pss 49:16] Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, When the glory of his house is increased.
 [Pss 49:17] For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.
 [Pss 49:18] Though while he lived he blessed his soul (And men praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself,)
 [Pss 49:19] He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see the light.
 [Pss 49:20] Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, Is like the beasts that perish.

THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION

- I. A clarion call to the peoples of earth to listen to the message of Jehovah (vss. 1-4).
- II. The cost of the redemption of the soul (vss. 5-12).
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Psalms 45-49 form a cluster of poems written by the sons of Korah. Psalms 45-48 are prophetic and deal with the millennial kingdom of our Lord, when He returns in glory to establish His reign of righteousness on the earth. But Psalm 49, which we are to consider this month in a limited way, deals with one aspect of the greatest theme of all: that of redemption.

The seed of Abraham was chosen in order to become a channel of world blessing: "In thee and in thy seed shall all families of earth be blessed." In keeping with this plan God placed Israel in Palestine, which is the center of the earth, and made her the hub of the nations. This truth is seen in Deuteronomy 32:8,9:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
 When he separated the children of men,
 He set the bounds of the peoples
 According to the number of the children of Israel.
 For Jehovah's portion is his people;
 Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Frequently the Jewish people lost sight of their world-mission and became engulfed in their own national affairs and problems. The prophets and the psalmists therefore had to call their attention constantly to their original call and their position among the nations. Psalm 49 is one that gives the Chosen People the true perspective of their existence and calling in the world, namely, that of giving God's truth to all nations.

I. A clarion call to the peoples of earth to listen to the message of Jehovah

1 Hear this, all ye peoples;
 Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world,
 2 Both low and high, Rich and poor together.
 3 My mouth shall speak wisdom; And the meditation
 of my heart shall be of understanding.
 4 I will incline mine ear to a parable:
 I will open my dark saying upon the harp (vss. 1-4).

All peoples--all the inhabitants of the world--are called upon to listen to the message which the prophet has from God. This language reminds one of the Great Commission which was given by our risen Lord to the Apostles as found in Matthew 28:19,20. Since Jesus, after His resurrection, was given all authority in heaven and in earth, He instructed His disciples to go to all nations and make disciples of them. They were therefore to baptize the believers and to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He commanded them. This same note of universalism is found throughout the Scriptures, here and there. No one is to be passed by. All need the message--both the low and the high, the rich and the poor. In God's sight all are bankrupt and need salvation.

The inspired writer assures his readers that his mouth will speak words of wisdom. The fear or worship of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom. Since he intends to speak about worshiping and serving God, the author speaks of his giving them wisdom. The things about which he has received a revelation of God are

the subjects upon which he had meditated. He doubtless, when the Spirit of God was not upon him, had been thinking of the great subject of redemption. Finally the Spirit made the revelation to him concerning this most important theme. He therefore declared that he would tell the people of the world about this momentous question, in which he, from the illumination of the Spirit, had received understanding.

In verse 4 he assures his readers that he will incline his ear to a parable. This word in the Hebrew original does not have exactly the same significance that it does in the New Testament. A parable in the Old Testament is a pithy saying, a proverb. The Book of Proverbs is called the Book of the Parables of Solomon. The same word occurs in Numbers 23:7,18; 24:3,15 and means a divine revelation that was made by the Spirit of God to the prophet. Thus when the psalmist declared that he would incline his ear to a parable, he meant that he would listen to a revelation which God was making to him and then would open up this hidden or dark saying upon the harp. He would expound the revelation and would set the words of his song to music. Thus by the Spirit of God the revelation was made known to him. Then by the same, infallible Spirit he wrote down the message, combining the thoughts with words which the Spirit of God dictated. Then the poem is set to music. After that it was sung to the people who gathered from time to time at the Temple to worship God.

I wish that this entire psalm could today be set to the very highest type of music and could be sung all over the world to people in order that they might get this message concerning redemption. In the hands of a master composer who has had an experience of grace in his own heart, Psalm 49 could be turned into one of the greatest oratorios that has ever been written. May God raise up some great composer to set this revelation to music. Then I would like to hear it rendered by a well-trained, Spirit-filled choir.

II. The cost of the redemption of the soul

5 Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, When iniquity at my heels compasseth me about?
 6 They that trust in their wealth, And boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;
 7 None *of them* can by any means redeem his brother,
 Nor give to God a ransom for him
 8 (For the redemption of their life is costly, And it faileth for ever),
 9 That he should still live alway, That he should not see corruption.
 10 For he shall see it. Wise men die; The fool and the brutish alike perish, And leave their wealth to others.
 11 Their inward thought is, *that* their houses *shall continue* for ever, *And* their dwelling-places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names.
 12 But man *being* in honor abideth not: He is like the beasts that perish (vss. 5-12).

According to verse 5 the psalmist was certain of his salvation and could speak with assurance. Moreover, he had an unswerving faith in God and was confident that the Lord would protect him under all conditions regardless of circumstances. Fear was not in his vocabulary. He believed that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose. This abiding confidence in God, expressed in verse 5, is likewise found in Psalm 11. The Lord constantly watches over His people. He has promised to protect and to care for those who put their trust in Him. He is the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep to green pastures, and who causes them to lie down beside still waters.

He protects them and is at their side as their defense regardless of the deep valleys through which they may be called to pass.

Man is unable to care for himself. Sometimes we think that we are old enough and sufficiently wise to take care of our interests and to protect ourselves. When we come to this conclusion, we forget that there is the great enemy of the soul, Satan, who is stalking abroad throughout the earth in an effort to take people off their guard and to ensnare them. In addition to him and his hosts, there is the enmity of unregenerated people who hate those who love the Lord. In such an environment no Christian is able to take care of himself. Everyone must therefore trust God to protect him.

Verses 6, 7, and 9 constitute one sentence. Verse 8 is parenthetical; yet it is most important. In contrast with the psalmist who was trusting God to take care of him through all earthly trials and to take him to Himself in glory for ever and ever, there were those rich, worldly men and women who had never personally accepted God and His salvation, but who were trusting in the things which they possessed to meet all their needs. Thus our author declared that not one of those who trust in their wealth and boast themselves of their vast riches is able, in any way, whatsoever, to redeem his brother or to give to God a ransom for himself, that he should still live always and not die and see corruption. A person may have vast holdings and untold, inestimable wealth; everything may be moving along smoothly today; but tomorrow new conditions may arise and unexpected situations develop. Then his wealth and riches may take the wings of the morning, so to speak, and depart. As an illustration of this principle we may look at the case of Job, a man who was perfect in his day and time. He was the richest and most influential man in all the East of his day. Unexpectedly, suddenly one stroke after another swept all his riches away. He lost his health and was prostrate upon his back. Nevertheless he continued to trust in God who at last delivered him and gave him double of everything that he had lost. None of his riches could have in anywise saved him. Riches and wealth are utterly unreliable and uncertain. No matter how much wealth a person may have, he cannot purchase his salvation. He cannot pay God a ransom for his soul. The soul is spiritual and is eternal. Riches are transitory, vain, empty things. I once read in a magazine article that Henry Ford was worth two billion dollars. His combined wealth could not purchase his salvation. Salvation is a free gift from God and is given to the one who in true penitence looks to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepts Him as his ransom, as his Redeemer.

All human efforts avail nothing as far as salvation is concerned. Works are excluded. Performing acts of charity add up to the sum total of nothing when the matter of salvation is considered.

In verse 8 the psalmist declared that the redemption of the life of the individual is costly and that an attempt to win salvation fails every time when the person is depending upon his own wealth and earthly possessions to procure it.

Our psalmist leaves a person in no doubt that man by human efforts and labors cannot obtain redemption—neither for himself nor for his brother. But from other passages of Scripture we know how man may be saved. He must accept the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He who believes on the Son has everlasting life now and shall not come into condemnation (John 5:24). The Lord Jesus Christ has purchased us by His death upon the cross. Satan had a strangle hold upon the human family. Our Lord championed the cause of fallen man, becoming a man, and in the realm of the will conquered Satan and by dying for our sins and rising for our justification brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. In doing so, He wrested from him the power and

authority over man. Those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemption by faith are granted life eternal as a free gift. When God once gives life to a man because of his putting his trust in the Lord, he is safe for time and for eternity. To God be all the praise for our redemption.

In verse 9 we are told that no one can redeem his brother so that he shall still live and not see corruption. It is appointed unto men once to die and after that judgment. This is the general order of things. There is to be an exception to this rule. Those who are in Christ, and who are alive when the Lord descends from heaven to the air to raise the dead in Christ, will not taste of death but will be caught up out of the earth to meet the Lord in the air. They, and they alone, are the ones who shall never die. But their being exempted from dying is the result, not of man's efforts, but of Christ's championing man's cause and of His conquering death.

We are told in verse 10 that the wise die; likewise the foolish; and all leave their wealth behind them. Man brought nothing into this world, neither can he take anything out when he goes. He can wear only one suit of clothes at a time, eat one meal at a time. Man should therefore trust God, yield his life to Him, live one day at a time, trusting God to meet his needs, while he himself lives for the honor and the glory of God and the blessing of humanity.

Many Christians hoard up wealth and finally, by will, leave what they have accumulated to others who seldom have the same spirit, a similar outlook, and interest in the Lord's work. *What they have is entrusted to them to use while they are alive*, not after they have passed out into the great beyond. In many instances when wealth, by will, is left to relatives, friends, or an institution to be used in the Lord's cause, a goodly portion is diverted by legal processes and technicalities into other channels. I am thinking of a legacy that was made by a dear sister in the Lord to the Biblical Research Society. After all legal expenses were deducted--inheritance taxes, lawyer's fees, and court costs--the Society received around two-thirds of the estate to be used in the Lord's cause. The good and wise steward of the Lord should use that which God entrusts to him during his life-time--while it is in his hands to administer--if he wishes to be faithful to God and to use the entrusted wealth to His glory and honor. In view of the experience to which I have just referred, my advice to every saint of God is to use whatever property and money the Lord places in his hands for the glory of God and the salvation of souls while he is still alive and can see that such funds are properly used in the Lord's work. Do not leave wealth and goods for heirs to fuss over and for attorneys to gobble up. (This exhortation does not mean that a man should not provide for his own household. Neither does it imply that all attorneys are unprincipled and will cheat and swindle. There are doubtless many good true Christian lawyers. There are also heirs who are righteous and want only that which naturally and rightfully belongs to them.) But if we want what God has entrusted to us *to count for His service to the utmost and to accrue to our credit throughout all eternity*, we ourselves should administer it to His glory and honor while it is in our hands.

The rich, who are indifferent to spiritual things, just think of passing their wealth on to their heirs, expecting it to continue with them from generation to generation. Thus they call their lands or estates by their own names.

We learn from verse 12 that though a man be in honor, he cannot abide. He is simply passing across the stage of human activity. He passes this way but once. All his glory and possessions he leaves behind and faces his Creator in the future--but how? Either saved or lost; either full-handed or empty-handed--which? In one particular he is like the beast--he cannot live always. He must pass on into the great beyond.

III. The future state of the saved and the lost

13 This their way is their folly: Yet after them men approve their sayings.

14 They are appointed as a flock for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd: And the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;

And their beauty shall be for Sheol to consume, That there be no habitation for it.

15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; For he will receive me (vss. 13-15).

Having shown the temporary nature of wealth and the way men of the world act in their hoarding up wealth and passing it on to their descendants, the psalmist in verse 13 declares that the way the worldly man does with reference to his riches is folly. Nevertheless, men approve of their sayings and their actions.

All men and women who are not true servants of God are like a flock of sheep--they are appointed for Sheol, and death shall be their shepherd. Regardless of their personal appearance in this life Sheol will consume their beauty. All will be reduced to mere shades of their former selves. When they go down into Sheol they will never return to this life again.

Let us not think of Sheol mentioned here in verse 14 as being hell, for it is not. Sheol of the Old Testament is called Hades in the New. It is the place of departed spirits, a region in the center of the earth to which all went upon death prior to the triumph of our Lord. Since He destroyed the power of him that had control of death, that is, the devil, by His own sacrificial death upon the cross for us, the believer today no longer goes to Hades as prior to that great victory. On the other hand, the believer upon death goes immediately into the presence of the Lord. He will obtain his spiritual resurrection body at the time when Jesus descends from heaven to the air for His saints and raises the dead in Christ. At that time their spirits will re-unite with their bodies, which will be in an immortal, glorified state.

Finally, at the judgment of the great white throne, which occurs at the conclusion of the Millennium, all the lost who now go to Sheol will arise from the dead, will come to judgment (Rev. 20:11-15), and there hear the announcement of condemnation pronounced against them. Then they will go off into everlasting punishment from which they shall never return--the saddest of all thoughts that ever come to man.

Our psalmist, in contrast with the fate that awaits the worldly godless wealthy ones, declares that God will redeem his soul from the power of Sheol; for He will receive him. The human authors of the Scriptures realized that, if Jehovah did not come in their own day, they would go down to Sheol; but they furthermore knew that they would be brought out of Sheol into the blessed presence of His holiness eventually. But now since Christ has won the victory, the child of God no longer goes to Sheol as stated above.

IV. The passing out of this life of the man of the world

- 16 Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, When the glory of his house is increased:
 17 For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.
 18 Though while he lived he blessed his soul (And men praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself),
 19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see the light.
 20 Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, Is like the beasts that perish (vss. 16-20).

There is a grave danger that even children of God may become ensnared by the deceitfulness of riches and desire to have them. Against such a possibility the psalmist warns the saint in verses 16 and 17. One therefore should not be perturbed about another's becoming rich and his fame and reputation passing on to his descendants. The rich man, as we learn from verse 17, carries nothing out of this life. His glory does not descend after him. Each generation stands or falls upon its own merits.

Though a man during life blesses himself and looks out for his own interests (for men will praise others when they thus act and live), he will go out of this life the same as everyone else has done. The unsaved will pass from the light of this life into eternal night and darkness. According to verse 19 they shall never see the light again. Though a man is in honor and yet does not understand the real issues of life, he is like the beast that perisheth--like the beast in that they pass out of this life without any hope of returning.

We have but one life to live. That which pertains to this life alone is temporal. That which endures is that which is done for Christ and in His power. Whatsoever therefore we do, let us do all to the glory of God, giving thanks to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though Israel has lost sight of her original call and commission of God to proclaim His truth to the world, she will yet see her age-long mistake and will return to her high calling, giving the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Of these facts we may be certain; for in the prophetic word we learn that the nation of Israel will eventually see the mistake which she made in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as her Lord, Savior, and Messiah, will repudiate the national sin of rejecting Him, and will plead for Him to return. When she does this, He will answer her cry, return, and deliver her.

Having learned the truth of the gospel and having come to know Him, she will give forth the message of salvation to all nations and lead all men to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Since, however, Israel does not now have this message of salvation, since it is God's plan by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe, and since we Christians have the truth today, it is for us to proclaim it to all Israel now so that she can see her mistake, accept the Lord Jesus, and then give forth the message of redeeming love to all mankind.

Let us therefore pray for Israel. Then let us back up our prayers by all means within our power to give the gospel to our Lord's brethren according to the flesh that they may fit into the plan and purpose of God.