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For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

PSALM 49: 1 Hear this, all you peoples. Listen, all you inhabitants of the world,

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All men are invited to attend to lessons of wisdom relative to the insufficiency of earthly good to save or prolong life; to secure the resurrection from the dead, Psa 49:1-9. Death is inevitable, Psa 49:10. The vain expectations of rich men, Psa 49:11-13. Death renders all alike, Psa 49:14. The psalmist encourages and fortifies himself against envying the apparently prosperous state of the wicked, who are brutish, and die like beasts, Psa 49:15-20.

The title, To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah, has nothing particular in it; and the Versions say little about it. One of the descendants of the children of Korah might have been the author of it; but when or on what occasion it was made, cannot now be discovered. The author aimed to be obscure, and has succeeded; for it is very difficult to make out his meaning. It is so much in the style of the Book of Job, that one might believe they had the same author; and that this Psalm might have made originally a part of that book. "It seems," says Dr. Dodd, "to be a meditation on the vanity of riches, and the usual haughtiness of those who possess them. As a remedy for this, he sets before them the near prospect of death, from which no riches can save, in which no riches can avail. The author considers the subject he is treating as a kind of wisdom concealed from the world; a mystery, an occult science with respect to the generality of mankind." Dr. Kennicott has given an excellent translation of this Psalm which is very literal, simple, and elegant; and by it the reader will be convinced that a good translation of a difficult passage is often better than a comment.

Verse 1

Hear this, all ye people - The four first verses contain the author's exordium or introduction, delivered in a very pompous style and promising the deepest lessons of wisdom and instruction. But what was rare then is common-place now.

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PSALM 49: 2 both low and high, rich and poor together.

PSALM 49: 3 My mouth will speak words of wisdom. My heart shall utter understanding.

PSALM 49: 4 I will incline my ear to a proverb. I will open my riddle on the harp.

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Verse 4

I will incline mine ear to a parable - This was the general method of conveying instruction among the Asiatics. They used much figure and metaphor to induce the reader to study deeply in order to find out the meaning. This had its use; it obliged men to think and reflect deeply; and thus in some measure taught them the use, government, and management of their minds.

My dark saying upon the harp - Music was sometimes used to soothe the animal spirits, and thus prepare the mind for the prophetic influx.

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PSALM 49: 5 Why should I fear in the days of evil, when iniquity at my heels surrounds me?

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Verse 5

The iniquity of my heels - Perhaps עקבי akebai, which we translate my heels, should be considered the contracted plural of עקבים akebim, supplanters. The verse would then read thus: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, though the iniquity of my supplanters should compass me about." The Syriac and Arabic have taken a similar view of the passage: "Why should I fear in the evil day, when the iniquity of my enemies compasses me about." And so Dr. Kennicott translates it.

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PSALM 49: 6 Those who trust in their wealth, and boast in the multitude of their riches—

PSALM 49: 7 none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give God a ransom for him.

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Verse 7

None of them can by any means redeem his brother - Wealth cannot save from death; brother, however rich, cannot save his brother; nor will God accept riches as a ransom for the life or soul of any transgressor. To procure health of body, peace of mind, redemption from death, and eternal glory, riches are sought for and applied in vain.

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PSALM 49: 8 For the redemption of their life is costly, no payment is ever enough,

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Verse 8

For the redemption of their soul is precious - It is of too high a price to be redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver or gold, and has required the sacrificial death of Christ.

And it ceaseth for ever - This is very obscure, and may apply to the ransom which riches could produce. That ransom must be for ever unavailable, because of the value of the soul. Or this clause should be added to the following verse, and read thus: "And though he cease to be, (וחדל vechadal), during the hidden time, (לעולם leolam); yet he shall live on through eternity, (ויהי עוד לנצח) vichi od lanetsach), and not see corruption." This is probably the dark saying which it was the design of the author to utter in a parable, and leave it to the ingenuity of posterity to find it out. The verb חדל chadal signifies a cessation of being or action, and עולם olam often signifies hidden time, that which is not defined, and the end of which is not ascertained, though it is frequently used to express endless duration. This translation requires no alteration of the original text, and conveys a precise and consistent meaning.

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PSALM 49: 9 That he should live on forever, that he should not see corruption.

PSALM 49: 10 For he sees that wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless perish, and leave their wealth to others.

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 Verse 10

For he seeth that wise men die - Though they may be rich, and their wisdom teach them the best method of managing their riches so as to derive all the good from them they can possibly produce, yet they die as well as the fool and the poor ignorant man; and their wealth is left to others who will be equally disappointed in their expectation from it.

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PSALM 49: 11 Their inward thought is that their houses will endure forever, and their dwelling places to all generations. They name their lands after themselves.

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## Verse 11

Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever - Thus, by interpolation, we have endeavored to patch up a sense to this clause. Instead of קירבם kirbam, their inward part, the Septuagint appear to have used a copy in which the second and third letters have been transposed קברם kibram, their sepulchres; for they translate: Καὶ οἱ τάφοι αὐτῶν οἰκίαι αὐτῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· "For their graves are their dwellings for ever." So six or seven feet long, and two or three wide, is sufficient to hold the greatest conqueror in the universe! What a small house for the quondam possessor of numerous palaces and potent kingdoms!

They call their lands after their own names - There would have been no evil in this if it had not been done on an infidel principle. They expected no state but the present; and if they could not continue themselves, yet they took as much pains as possible to perpetuate their memorial.

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PSALM 49: 12 But man, despite his riches, doesn't endure. He is like the animals that perish.

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## Verse 12

Man being in honor abideth not - However rich, wise, or honorable, they must die; and if they die not with a sure hope of eternal life, they die like beasts. See on Psa 49:20 (note).

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PSALM 49: 13 This is the destiny of those who are foolish, and of those who approve their sayings.  
Selah.

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## Verse 13

Their posterity approve their sayings - Go the same way; adopt their maxims.

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PSALM 49: 14 They are appointed as a flock for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd.

The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. Their beauty shall decay in Sheol, far from their mansion.

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Verse 14

Like sheep they are laid in the grave - לִישׁוֹל לִישׁוֹל lishol, into sheol, the place of separate spirits.

Death shall feed on them מוֹת יִרְעֵם maveth yirem, "Death shall feed them!" What an astonishing change! All the good things of life were once their portion, and they lived only to eat and drink; and now they live in sheol, and Death himself feeds them? and with what? Damnation. Houbigant reads the verse thus: "Like sheep they shall be laid in the place of the dead; death shall feed on them; their morning shepherds rule over them; and their flesh is to be consumed. Destruction is to them in their folds."

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PSALM 49: 15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

Selah.

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Verse 15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave - מִיַּד שְׂאוֹל miyad sheol, "from the hand of sheol." That is, by the plainest construction, I shall have a resurrection from the dead, and an entrance into his glory; and death shall have no dominion over me.

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PSALM 49: 16 Don't be afraid when a man is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased.

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Verse 16

Be not thou afraid when one is made rich - Do not be envious; do not grieve: it will do you no harm; it will do him no good. All he gets will be left behind; he can carry nothing with him. Even his glory must stay behind; he shall mingle with the common earth.

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PSALM 49: 17 For when he dies he shall carry nothing away. His glory shall not descend after him.

PSALM 49: 18 Though while he lived he blessed his soul— and men praise you when you do well for yourself—

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Verse 18

He blessed his soul - He did all he could to procure himself animal gratifications, and he was applauded for it; for it is the custom of the world to praise them who pay most attention to their secular interest; and he who attends most to the concerns of his soul is deemed weak and foolish, and is often persecuted by an ungodly world.

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PSALM 49: 19 he shall go to the generation of his fathers. They shall never see the light.

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Verse 19

They shall never see light - Rise again they shall; but they shall never see the light of glory, for there is prepared for them the blackness of darkness for ever.

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PSALM 49: 20 A man who has riches without understanding, is like the animals that perish.

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Verse 20

Man that is in honor - The rich and honorable man who has no spiritual understanding, is a beast in the sight of God. The spirit of this maxim is, A man who is in a dignified official situation, but destitute of learning and sound sense, is like a beast. The important place which he occupies reflects no honor upon him, but is disgraced by him. Who has not read the fable of the beautifully carved head? It was every thing that it should be, but had no brains.

This verse has been often quoted as a proof of the fall of man; and from *לילה ילין* yalin, (in Psa 49:12), which signifies to lodge for a night, it has been inferred that Adam fell on the same day on which he was created, and that he did not spend a single night in the terrestrial paradise. Adam, who was in a state of glory, did not remain in it one night, but became stupid and ignorant as the beasts which perish. But we may rest assured this is no meaning of the text.