

Redemption

Redemption From Distress or Death



SESSION 4

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The Bible sometimes uses redemption language to describe people being delivered from situations of distress or death, even without a redemption payment or the help of a relative who acts as redeemer.

How does the idea of being rescued from certain death relate to redemption in the Bible?

Story Context

Saul is anointed as Israel's first king, but he trusts his own wisdom more than God's. In the preceding narrative, Saul gets nervous about an impending battle and decides to violate God's instruction by offering a sacrifice before the prophet-priest, Samuel, arrives. Saul thinks he has a good reason—he wants to persuade God to give them victory. But Samuel chastises him for being so foolish (1 Sam. 13).

Now Saul forces his soldiers to swear an oath to fast from food for the rest of the day or until they defeat their enemies. Once again, he thinks

that a ritual will convince God to help them defeat their enemies. The soldiers all swear to the oath on punishment of death, but Saul's son Jonathan misses the announcement and eats some honey. When Saul finds out, he thinks he has no choice but to kill Jonathan. In his world, oaths are binding even unto death.

But there's a twist. The whole army offers a counter-oath, persuading Saul to spare Jonathan's life. At this crucial point, the narrative uses *padah* to describe the soldiers' action. They "redeem" or "rescue" Jonathan from certain death (1 Sam. 14:45).

Literary Design

Psalm 49 emphasizes the importance of trusting in God and not fearing those who foolishly trust in wealth for life. References to *padah* ("redeem" or "rescue") frame the poem's central pivot section (Ps. 49:7, 15). Exposing the weakness of wealth, the psalm declares that no person could ever "redeem" (*padah*) another from death forever because the "redemption payment" (*kopher* in v. 7b; *pidyon* in v. 8a) for a human life is too costly. Death renders all humanity in need of both divine rescue and an infinitely valuable redemption payment, but the poet trusts that God will "redeem" (*padah*) him (Ps. 49:15; see also Ps. 55:18). He alone has the power to give and sustain all life.

Re-Read Scripture

1 Samuel 14:24-28

Jonathan Eats Honey

²⁴ Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food.

²⁵ The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶ When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. ²⁸ Then one of the soldiers told him, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be anyone who eats food today!' That is why the men are faint."

1 Samuel 14:43-45

⁴³ Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”
So Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff.
And now I must die!”

⁴⁴ Saul said, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan.”

⁴⁵ But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

Psalm 49:7-9

⁷ No one can redeem the life of another
or give to God a ransom for them—

⁸ the ransom for a life is costly,
no payment is ever enough—

⁹ so that they should live on forever
and not see decay.

Psalm 49:15

¹⁵ But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;
he will surely take me to himself.

Psalm 55:16-18

¹⁶ As for me, I call to God,
and the Lord saves me.

¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.

¹⁸ He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.

Summary of 1 Samuel 14:24-28 and 43-45

Verses 24-28: Saul’s Rash Oath and Jonathan Eating Honey

During the ongoing battle against the Philistines (following Jonathan’s earlier bold attack with his armor-bearer that sparked a divine panic in the enemy camp), the Israelite soldiers were exhausted and hungry.

King Saul imposed a strict oath on his army: “Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” As a result, none of the troops ate anything all day, leaving them faint and distressed.

The army passed through a forest where honey was dripping on the ground. The soldiers saw it but refused to touch any because they feared breaking Saul’s oath.

Jonathan, Saul’s son, had not heard about the oath. He dipped the end of his staff into the honeycomb, ate some, and felt refreshed—his eyes “brightened.” One of the soldiers then told him about his father’s curse, explaining why the men were so weak. Jonathan later criticized the oath, saying it had troubled the land and prevented a greater victory.

Verses 43-45: Saul’s Judgment and the People’s Intervention

Later that day (after further events, including Saul using lots to identify sin and discovering Jonathan was the one who broke the oath), Saul confronted his son:

“Tell me what you have done.” Jonathan replied honestly: “I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!”

Saul declared, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan.” He was determined to execute his own son to uphold the oath.

The soldiers strongly protested: “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.”

The people ransomed (rescued) Jonathan, and he was spared. Saul then stopped pursuing the Philistines.

Key Themes in This Passage

- Saul’s impulsive, self-focused oath (centered on “my vengeance”) burdens the troops and nearly costs him his heroic son.
- Jonathan acts unknowingly and is strengthened by the honey, highlighting the foolishness of the vow.
- The army’s intervention shows they recognized Jonathan’s faith-driven actions (earlier in the chapter) as the true source of Israel’s deliverance that day, crediting God’s help through him.

This section illustrates Saul's growing instability and poor leadership, contrasting with Jonathan's courage and the people's common sense. It fits into the broader narrative of Saul's reign declining while God prepares to raise up David.

Summary of Psalm 49:7-9, 15

Verses 7-9: No Human Can Ransom a Life from Death

No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them— the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough— so that they should live on forever and not see decay.

These verses emphasize the futility of relying on **wealth or human effort** to escape death. Even the richest person cannot pay God enough money, possessions, or any price to buy eternal life for themselves or for someone else. The cost of redeeming a soul from the grave (or "the pit"/Sheol) is far too high for any mortal to afford. No amount of riches can prevent eventual death and decay.

This fits the broader theme of Psalm 49, which warns against envying or fearing the wealthy wicked— their money cannot save them from the same fate as everyone else.

Verse 15: God's Redemption

But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.

In striking contrast to the impossibility described in verses 7-9, the psalmist expresses confident hope: **God Himself** can and will ransom the soul of the righteous from the power of death (Sheol). God will receive the believer to Himself, implying deliverance and eternal fellowship with God beyond the grave.

Key Themes and Contrast

- **Human limitation:** Riches, power, or any human ransom are powerless to grant immortality or prevent decay (vv. 7-9).
- **Divine power:** Only God can redeem from death and bring the righteous into His presence (v. 15). The sharp "But God" highlights this turning point of hope.

This passage underscores the vanity of trusting in wealth and points forward to the ultimate redemption that comes through God alone—a theme fulfilled in the New Testament through Jesus Christ, who gave His life as the sufficient ransom for many.

The selected verses form a powerful mini-lesson within Psalm 49: money cannot buy eternal life, but God can graciously provide it to those who trust in Him.

Summary of Psalm 55:16-18

Verses 16-18:

As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.

Simple Summary:

In the middle of betrayal, fear, and intense trouble (especially from a close friend who had turned against him), David declares his firm decision: “I will call on God.”

He describes his persistent prayer life — crying out to the Lord three times a day (evening, morning, and noon). Despite the many enemies fighting against him, David confidently states that God hears his voice and rescues him safely. He is kept unharmed even though the opposition is strong.

Key Themes:

- Persistent prayer: David doesn't pray only once — he prays regularly throughout the day.
- God hears and delivers: Even in overwhelming distress and betrayal, calling on the Lord brings rescue and peace.
- Personal faith amid crisis: The phrase “As for me...” shows David choosing to trust God while others around him were treacherous.

This short but powerful section is one of the most encouraging parts of Psalm 55. It shows that no matter how many people oppose us or how deep the betrayal, consistent prayer to God brings deliverance and protection.