THE FIRST ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES surveyed the range of explanations for Peter's interpretation of Psalm 16 in Acts 2.1 Some hold that Psalm 16:10 ("For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay") was the psalmist's plea for preservation for himself from crisis, but later that preservation came to refer to the Messiah's own resurrection. Others hold that the psalmist spoke instead of his resurrection and in some way referred to Messiah. This article develops the interpretation of that key verse of Psalm 16 in its original context.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF PSALM 16

A strong case exists that the superscription יִתְנָא designates Davidic authorship. Though the lamed preposition has a variety of usages, when linked with a specific person in superscriptions it designates that person as the author. This usage is confirmed outside the Psalter in Isaiah 38:9 and Habakkuk 3:1. It is also demonstrated in the parallel superscriptions of 2 Samuel 22:1 and Psalm 18:1. This usage fits with David's reputation as a prolific poet and his role as Israel's worship leader. Davidic authorship was accepted by ancient sources, such as Ben Sirach (47:8–10). Also the Dead Sea Scrolls used lamed to indicate authorship.2

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* This is the second article in a three-part series "Peter's Use of Psalm 16 in Acts 2."


2  Column XXVII of the Psalms Scroll (11QPs) describes David's prolific composition of psalms. The succeeding column then employs the יִתְנָא superscription to introduce a psalm written by David in his childhood.
Evidence within the Book of Psalms also supports the Davidic authorship of Psalm 16. This psalm shares the title מַעֲכֹס with Psalms 56–60, and each of these psalms bears the title דָּבָר. Psalms 56, 57, 59, and 60 carry additional notes in the superscriptions that relate those four psalms to specific events in David’s life. Also Delitzsch and Hengstenberg note vocabulary similarities between Psalm 16 and other psalms ascribed to David.3

These points of evidence in support of Davidic authorship of Psalm 16 agree with the New Testament, which specifically names David as the author of this psalm (Acts 2:25, 31; 13:35–36).

THE SETTING OF PSALM 16

Apart from a specified event in a superscription or a clear historical reference within a psalm, its background cannot be known with certainty. In the case of Psalm 16, however, Peter referred to the Davidic Covenant (Acts 2:30; cf. Ps. 132:11) just before he quoted Psalm 16:10. The conceptual and verbal links between this psalm and David’s covenantal reflections in narrative portions (2 Sam. 7:22–23) provide significant support for the setting.4 His having received this covenant likely affected the message of the psalm.

THE STRUCTURE OF PSALM 16

Scholars disagree on how to view the structure of Psalm 16. However, two facts noted by most scholars offer some insight into its structure. The first observation is that the psalm exhibits a heightening from the beginning until its climax in verse 11. David’s thoughts began with Yahweh’s current blessing in his life (vv. 1–6) and concluded with his hope of Yahweh’s blessing in the future (vv. 8–11). This movement, or intensification, is typical of Hebrew poetry.5 The second observation is that verse 7 is seen as the pivot of the poem.6 Verses 1–6 focus on David’s present relationship with

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Yahweh, verses 8–11 emphasize his future hope, and verse 7 bridges these two main sections through praise for Yahweh’s ongoing instruction to David. Also supporting this structural proposal is the observation that verses 2–6 seem to function as a unit. The two cola of verse 2 preface verses 3–6. The statement “You are my Lord” (v. 2a) is expanded in the thoughts of verses 3–4, in which David declared that Yahweh’s people were his only source of pleasure (v. 3) and that he found no pleasure at all in pagan rituals (v. 4). The words “beyond You I have no good” (v. 2b) are developed in the declarations in verses 5–6. David used images of an allotment and a cup to proclaim that Yahweh was his inheritance (v. 5). He then alluded to the conquest and division of the land under Joshua as a powerful metaphor to describe Yahweh as his source of blessing (v. 6).

Verses 8–11 also function as a unit, marked off by the repetition of “right hand” in verses 8 and 11. Also these verses move from present spiritual blessing to future physical confidence. This arrangement preserves intact the portion of Psalm 16 quoted by Peter in Acts 2, namely, Psalm 16:8–11.

**The Message of Psalm 16**

The message of Psalm 16 may be summarized in this way: David’s unmatched present joys in Yahweh produced a future confident hope of unbroken fellowship and resurrection for David and the Holy One.

David, who had turned to Yahweh for refuge, reveled in the delights of his relationship with Him (vv. 1–6). Yahweh blessed David and would instruct and counsel him (v. 7). These present joys and instruction from Yahweh then moved David to express confidence in the future—hope for David and the Holy One (vv. 8–11).

The opening verse of the psalm records David’s call for security from Yahweh, in whom he had sought refuge. David based his petition on his relationship with God. As already noted, this relationship was likely affected by Yahweh’s covenant with David.

David continued with the declaration to God, “You are my Lord” (v. 2). Then in verses 3–4 he expanded on his single-minded devotion to Yahweh. Since Yahweh was his Lord, David found all his delight in those who shared his fidelity to the only true Lord (v. 3). In striking contrast David recognized the multiplied grief of those who pursued false gods (v. 4a). David’s unqualified allegiance then spurred him to confess that he rejected idolatry, both sacrificial rituals and the acknowledgement of false gods (v. 4b). This confession of devotion harmonized with the covenantal expectations
given by Yahweh. Thus the covenant connection made in David’s plea for security and refuge (v. 1) continued in verses 2–4 as David voiced his own covenant fidelity. Verses 5–6 expand the conviction stated in verse 2b that Yahweh was David’s sole source of blessing. Using the imagery of the provision of land for Israel plus the image of a cup, David described Yahweh as his inheritance and as the wellspring of his life.

As already stated, verse 7 serves as a bridge in the psalm. The poet had painted a portrait of himself experiencing the sublime joys of Yahweh, his present inheritance (vv. 2–6). Then in verse 7 he disclosed the inner dialogue between himself and Yahweh. The dialogue was intensely personal both because of where it occurred (his “inmost being”) and when it occurred (“night hours”). This reflective and interactive dialogue moved the psalmist to cast an eye to the future.

The final section of the psalm (vv. 8–11) brings to a climax David’s expression of confidence in the Lord. This section is bracketed by the repetition of יְדוּעַ (“right hand”) in verses 8 and 11. David began this final section with the declaration that he kept Yahweh ever before him in his thinking (v. 8). Though he had occasionally slipped in that commitment, his life certainly was characterized by reverence for Yahweh. David’s future confidence then flowed from the reality of God’s proximity to him (“at my right hand”) to protect him.

David opened this section by speaking in general terms of his security (“I will not be shaken,” v. 8). Verse 9 signals the move from the general to the specific (physical security). Also verse 9 aids in moving the focus of the psalm from primarily spiritual blessings (vv. 2–6) to physical benefits from Yahweh (vv. 9–11).

**Exegesis of Verse 10**

How one interprets Psalm 16:10 affects one’s perspective on Peter’s interpretation in Acts 2. Several words need to be considered, words that are key to understanding the messianic and eschatological implications of the psalm.

Views concerning the sense of verse 10 may be divided into five categories. First, Dahood says the verse refers to translation, like those of Enoch and Elijah.7 Second, Briggs, Constant, and

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VanGemeren say the verse refers to David's communion with God after death. Third, Weiser and Aparicio interpret verse 10 as referring to unbroken fellowship (without clarifying the mode). Fourth, many scholars hold that the verse means David expected to be preserved from an untimely death. Fifth, many other interpreters believe the verse speaks of personal resurrection from the dead.


Verse 10 is linked to verse 9 through the conjunction כי ("for, because"), which expresses a causal relationship between the two verses. David wrote that his body rested securely (v. 9) because God would not abandon him. Thus his present confidence was based on the certainty that God would not desert him in the future.

Yahweh, David said, would not abandon him to Sheol. The Hebrew verb ביטל, "abandon," may come from one of two roots that are homonyms. While most scholars say the verb comes from the root "to abandon," Dahood says it comes from a different root meaning "to put or place." He argues that the phrase ו pci רות is synonymous with the Ugaritic 'db lars. This Ugaritic phrase denoted being placed or put into the earth, a reference to the underworld. Also Dahood observes that in Ugaritic the verbs ntn and 'db are used in poetic parallels to refer to placing or setting.

In Psalm 16:10 David employed ביטל and רות ("give") in parallel construction. Dahood also suggests that Psalm 16 should be seen in association with Psalms 49 and 73, psalms that he says imply translations like those of Enoch and Elijah. Therefore the verb ביטל means that David asked to be taken into God's presence rather than placed in Sheol. This view, however, is unconvincing. Dahood's conclusions are based solely on suggested Ugaritic parallels which assume that being put into the earth meant going to Sheol. No other interpreters take up Dahood's translation.

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14 Aparicio follows Dahood's findings closely, including authorship by a Canaanite convert to Yahwism, but he disagrees with him on the meaning of the verb. Aparicio asserts that the idea of rescue or preservation is not in the psalm (Tú Eres Mi Bien: Análisis Exégetico y Teológico del Salmo 16, 329).
The term בָּשׁ more likely has the meaning of the first root "to forsake or abandon." It often expresses Israel's breaking of the covenant or Yahweh's resulting judgment. Frequently in the Psalter the verb is used with a negative to describe God's loyalty to His followers: He would not abandon them (Pss. 9:10; 27:10; 37:25, 28, 33; 94:14). However, it also was the cry of lamenting worshipers who felt abandoned by Yahweh (22:1; 27:9; 38:21; 71:9, 18; 119:8). Delitzsch writes that in Psalm 16:10 בָּשׁ means to be "left to the unseen world," so that David "becomes its prey." Delitzsch concludes that בָּשׁ refers to the avoidance of death. "It is therefore the hope of not dying, that is expressed by David in ver. 10." 

The preposition ב may be translated "to" in the sense of expressing motion toward something, or it may be translated "in" as a reference to location. If the preposition is to be understood as "to" (i.e., "to Sheol"), then it supports the preservation-from-death view. David would have been asking God not to allow him to die. If, however, it is to be rendered "in," then it bolsters the resurrection view. David expressed hope in being physically delivered after death ("You will not leave me in Sheol," that is, "You will resurrect me"). The verb בָּשׁ normally takes only a direct object, but the indirect object construction here with ב is not infrequent in the Old Testament. According to Bierberg, when ב is employed in conjunction with בָּשׁ, the indirect object is always a person or something personified. The sole exception noted by Bierberg is Job 39:14, where the construction describes the ostrich that abandons her eggs "in" the earth.

Bierberg argues from the above evidence that the preposition ב in this construction means "to" only if the indirect object was a person or something personified. Otherwise the preposition means

16 Of the 214 occurrences in the Old Testament, more than one hundred fit this category.
17 Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, 2:228.
18 Waltke and O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 205.
19 The previous context (v. 9b) makes clear that the physical realm is in view.
20 He cites Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; and Psalm 49:11, where the indirect objects are people ("the poor" in Leviticus and "others" in Ps. 49).
21 Dahood also concludes that the preposition ב in Job 39:14 means "in" ("The Root בָּשׁ II in Job," 307–8).
“in.” He also cites evidence from synonyms of בֵּיתוּ. Bierberg states that since there is no textual reason for personifying Sheol, he chooses the reading “in.” However, this argument fails. He does not discuss Isaiah 18:6, in which the prophet condemned Cush, saying they would be abandoned (בֵּיתוּ) to (ג) the birds of prey. In this case the preposition clearly does not mean “in,” and there is no indication of personification. Bierberg does find possible support in the Septuagint translation of εἰς, and in the Vulgate and Peshitta. All seem to support the rendering “in.” The usage of ג to indicate “in” was also quite common in Ugaritic. Though usage yields no clear verdict, other evidence may point to the rendering “in.” In a sense the two options are quite close. Either could render the idea of going to death or of being abandoned after death.

The term בֵּיתוּ referred to both the grave and also the netherworld. It occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament. No clear cognates exist in other Semitic languages, and its etymology has been elusive. Sheol is depicted as located underneath the earth.

22 The synonyms are בֵּיתוּ, בָּני, and וְּפֶסֶף (Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 70).

23 Works that discuss the use of personification in Scripture cite examples where the personification was indicated by attributes or actions of humans. However, in this psalm no human description, emotion, or action is attributed to Sheol. For discussions of personification see Roy B. Zuck, Basic Bible Interpretation (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 151; Leland Ryken, How to Read the Bible as Literature (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 98–99; and John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York, The Bible as Literature: An Introduction, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29–30.

24 Even Bierberg admits, though, that εἰς “regularly connotes motion or action instead of rest” (Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 71 n. 12).

25 Ibid.


Merrill observes that the common utilization of the Hiphil of רות with בקושׁ indicates that people were “brought down” to בקושׁ against their will. When בקושׁ was personified, it was described as snatching away sinners (Job 24:19) or devouring them (Prov. 1:12). Personification of בקושׁ was rare, however. Harris argues that בקושׁ refers not to the abode of the spirits of the dead, but to the place where bodies were buried. Thus he says it is a synonym for other Hebrew terms for the grave. “All go to Sheol without moral distinctions because the grave is our common end. There is no case of punishment in Sheol because this is not applicable to the grave.”

Johnston, on the other hand, notes that of the forty-one times in which בקושׁ indicates someone’s fate, twenty-five of those refer to the wicked. Further the righteous wish to escape it (Pss. 30:4; 49:16; 86:13; Jon. 2:2), and wisdom could prevent one from going to it (Prov. 15:24; 23:14). Johnston concludes that בקושׁ was “used predominantly as a fate suitable for the ungodly but not the godly.” He then addresses the six passages that seem to contradict his view. Psalm 89:47 and Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 depict בקושׁ as the fate of humankind. The other four passages, according to Johnston, are of despairing righteous sufferers who interpreted their circumstances as divine judgment: Jacob (Gen. 37:35), Job (17:13–16), Hezekiah (Isa. 38:10), and a psalmist (Ps. 88:4). Johnston concludes that בקושׁ is “almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment, whether the wicked, the afflicted righteous, or all sinners.”

The different conclusions reached by the two may come from the distinct purposes in their research. Harris’s concern seems to be to refute the idea that בקושׁ is the dark abode of departed spirits;

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32 Harris, however, points out that the three verses in the psalms can refer to the grave (death) as does Jonah’s psalm that recounts his experience. The two proverbs teach that wisdom may enable one to avoid an untimely death (ibid.).

thus he emphasized that יָלֵם is the grave. He does not address the fact that in most cases יָלֵם is negative in nature, with reference to divine judgment.

Johnston, on the other hand, seems to try too hard to eliminate all exceptions to his divine judgment view. For example he relates Ecclesiastes 9:10 to divine judgment in the broader context of the book. But, while divine judgment may be a part of the book, the inevitability of death is a more prominent theme (2:3, 14, 16; 3:19; 5:18). Also 9:10 has in view the cessation of activity in death, not divine judgment. Therefore the biblical evidence seems to point to יָלֵם as referring simply to death, often with negative connotations. In many contexts death was the result of divine judgment, and in others it is regarded as the unavoidable fate of all humankind.

The context in which יָלֵם is used in Psalm 16:10 does not seem to include the idea of a netherworld or divine judgment. David’s confession of loyalty to Yahweh (vv. 1–4) and his description of Yahweh’s gracious blessing (vv. 5–6, 8) do not reflect concern for divine judgment. Further the emphasis on corruption in the second part of verse 10 points to the physical aspect of death, rather than to the spiritual realm. A physical rescue from death is the confidence that spurred David’s “flesh” to rest securely (v. 9). Therefore יָלֵם seems to be used in verse 10 to refer to the grave or physical death. Thus the verse expresses hope for a physical rescue after death, that is, a resurrection (“You will not leave me in Sheol”).

The second part of verse 10 advances the thought of the first. The verb יָצָא was used with the infinitive יהָלֵם (“to see”) to give the sense of “allowing” or “permitting” (cf. Gen. 20:6; Ps. 121:3). The word יָצָא in the infinitive generally refers to physical sight, but in Psalm 16:10 it is used figuratively. Naudé translates it as the “experiencing” of a state (decay).

The object of the verbal phrase “will not allow to see” is Your Holy One” (or more literally, “Your favored one”). Should this term be understood in the active sense (“faithful one”) or passive sense (“favored one”)? This word is the adjectival form of יָסָדָה, 129,134.

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36 Jakobus A. Naudé, “יָצָא,” in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, 3:1008. He also discusses the similar uses in Deuteronomy 11:2; Psalms 34:8; 89:48; and Habakkuk 1:3.
37 Besides numerous articles see Nelson Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (New York: KTAV, 1975); Katherine D. Sakenfeld, The Meaning of He-
which generally refers to "lovingkindness" or "loyal love," especially of Yahweh. When speaking of humans, it may indicate desired virtues (Ps. 109:12) or one who is a recipient of Yahweh's kindness (32:10). In the Psalms ḥesed almost exclusively describes the kindness of Yahweh toward His people. The adjectival form ḥesed occurs twenty-five times in the Book of Psalms. Besides its use in Psalm 16:10 it is used once with a negative to describe an unmerciful nation (43:1), twice in reference to the loving acts of Yahweh (145:17), and twenty-two times of Yahweh's people (4:3; 12:1; 18:25; 30:4; 31:23; 32:6; 37:28; 50:5; 52:9; 79:2; 85:8; 86:2; 89:19; 97:10; 116:15; 132:9; 16; 145:10; 148:14; 149:1, 5, 9). Fourteen of these twenty-two references employ a pronominal suffix indicating a relationship to Yahweh (30:4; 31:23; 37:28; 50:5; 52:9; 79:2; 85:8; 89:19; 97:10; 116:15; 132:9; 145:10; 148:14; 149:9). The remaining eight verses also suggest a relational connection to Yahweh. The New American Standard Bible and the New International Version usually translate ḥesed as "godly" (or the plural as "godly ones"), and the King James Version usually renders it "saint(s)." The word may convey the idea of a "faithful" person, one who keeps covenant (ḥesed) with God, or it may convey the idea of one who is "favored" by God, as a recipient of His covenantal lovingkindness.

Several key verses associate Yahweh's ḥesed with the covenant He made with David. Yahweh promised David that His ḥesed would never be taken from David's line (2 Sam. 7:15). This ensured that David's throne would be established forever (v. 16). When David reflected on Yahweh's establishing him, he recognized that Yahweh's ḥesed extended to his line forever on the basis of the covenant (22:51). Solomon praised Yahweh for His ḥesed, which established him on his father's throne as part of the Davidic Covenant (1 Kings 3:6). When Solomon dedicated the temple, he implored the Lord to remember the ḥesed He promised to David (2 Chron. 6:42). Here the

\[ \text{sed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry (Atlanta: Scholars, 1978); Glen Yarbrough, "The Significance of Hesed in the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959); and Gordon R. Clark, The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1993).} \]


\[ \text{Of the 129 occurrences of ḥesed in the Psalms only three do not refer to Yahweh's blessing of His people. Those three passages indicate kindness among men (Pss. 109:12, 16; 141:5).} \]

\[ \text{Though the term ḥesed was not directly related to the Davidic Covenant, the same concept is found in the synoptic account in 1 Kings 8:23–26.} \]
term רָפַת functions as a synonym for the covenant. Psalm 89 contemplates the Davidic Covenant and recalls Yahweh's anointing David as king (v. 20) because of Yahweh's רָפַת (v. 24). These verses show that David and many writers who followed him inextricably linked the רָפַת of Yahweh to David and the Davidic Covenant. Given the likelihood of a covenantal background for Psalm 16, the word רָפַת ought to be understood as the recipient of Yahweh's רָפַת as expressed in the Davidic Covenant.\(^{41}\)

Whether רָפַת means "pit" or "corruption/decay" is perhaps the most debated aspect of this psalm. The term is used twenty-three times in the Old Testament, all in poetic passages. Perowne says it makes little difference whether רָפַת is translated "pit" or "corruption." He argues that to define רָפַת as "pit" is to make it equivalent to death. Therefore what Peter argued in Acts 2 was that Christ did not experience death in the same way other men did. Others continued in death, but Christ was not held by it.\(^{42}\) Also Bock suggests that the idea of "corruption," clearly the translation choice of the Septuagint, rose conceptually from the Hebrew word רָפַת, even if the word originally meant "pit." The psalmist had declared that his flesh was "secure" (Ps. 16:9), and then he turned his attention to the matter of death. Death brought corruption. Therefore, Bock says, the Septuagint used the common Semitic device of wordplay as a way of "consciously clarifying the Semitic text by making its imagery more concrete."\(^{43}\) Therefore "pit" and "corruption," Bock suggests, are conceptually related. Though the original sense of the psalm was premature deliverance from death, the idea of resurrection could emerge conceptually from the Hebrew terms.\(^{44}\)

On the other hand other scholars say that the idea of resurrection cannot be found in Psalm 16:10. Thus Peter and later Paul built their kerygmatic arguments only on the Septuagint "mis-translations." The choice of "pit" versus "corruption" becomes then a question of the apostles' interpretation of the Old Testament and


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 200-201.

\(^{43}\) Bock, Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern, 175-76.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 173.
the integrity of their logic. As Driver bluntly states, the Hebrew sense of the psalm "will not support the argument which the Apostles built upon it." Though understanding the apostles' handling of the psalm quite differently, Chisholm also acknowledges the significance of the choice of translations: "If one reads 'pit' instead of 'decay,' it becomes more difficult to see a reference to literal death and burial in the text." Waltke also illustrates the significance of this term, centering his interpretation of Psalm 16 around the meaning of מָ谡ָה.

Though it may be possible to derive the idea of resurrection from the psalm, as argued by Perowne and Bock, whether it was originally intended by David is of considerable consequence. First, it impacts Old Testament theology. Many scholars conclude that Israel's eschatology had not evolved at that time to include resurrection. Second, it affects the understanding of the apostles' handling of this Old Testament verse. If resurrection was intended by David, then Peter's argument in Acts 2 regarding resurrection did not rely on mistranslations, later fuller senses, or escalation of meaning.

Scholars differ on whether מָ谡ָה has one root or two. Brown, Driver, and Briggs recognize only one possible root, namely, מָ谡, ("to sink down"), and they state that in Psalm 16:10 the noun means "pit." Gesenius, however, states that מָ谡 may stem from either מָ谡 ("to ruin") or מָ谡. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament concludes on the basis of current research in determining the root of מָ谡 (Moshe Held, "Pits and Pitfalls in Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew," Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University 5 [1973]: 176; and Marvin H. Pope, "The Word Shcht in Job 9:31," Journal of Biblical Literature 83 [1964]: 269-78).


Testament discusses the noun under both root headings. Harris concludes that some usages of רָעִי refer to decay, but he says that the matter of one or two roots cannot be resolved. Hamilton accepts the possibility of two roots, but he acknowledges the controversy surrounding the question. The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis also illustrates the difference in scholarly opinion. Merrill’s article on רָעִי gives no indication of “corruption” as a possible meaning in biblical Hebrew, though he briefly states that the word carries that meaning in Qumran texts. In the same volume, though, Waltke argues in detail for a second root and for the rendering “corruption.”

Philological evidence allows for the possibility of two distinct verbal roots producing nominal forms that are identical in appearance.

The possibility of a second root meaning “corruption” may also be supported in the writings of Qumran. Murphy argues that the noun רָעִי means moral corruption (1QS 9:16; 9:22; 10:19; CD 6:15; 13:14; 15:7–8). He also cites several texts in which the noun seems to be a synonym for Sheol (1QH 3:19; 8:28–29; 3:18; 1QS 11:13). He concludes that more evidence is needed to define רָעִי in the Qumran writings, but that the idea of corruption was certainly prevalent. The philological evidence therefore allows for a nominal form from רָעִי that means “corruption.”


57 If the noun רָעִי derives from the verb רָעִי, then the noun is feminine and the ר is the feminine suffix. Or if the noun רָעִי derives from the verb רָעִי, then the noun is masculine and ר is part of the root. Thus רָעִי may produce a feminine nominative identical in form to a masculine nominative from רָעִי, thus giving support to the view that רָעִי stems from one of two verbal roots. An example similar to this is the noun רָעִי, which comes from both the verb רָעִי (“rest,” as in Isa. 30:15) and from the verb רָעִי (“descend,” as in Isa. 30:30) (Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 74–75; and Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113).
ηπφ is associated with ἴκσ, a common term for pit, and Bierberg suggests that the phrase should be rendered “pit of corruption.”\(^5\) Vaccari says “corruption” is required, because rendering the phrase “pit of the pit” would be impossible.\(^6\)

The usage of ηπφ in Job 17:14 may be the most decisive example of the nominative form meaning “corruption.”\(^6\) The verse reads, “If I say to corruption [ηπφ], ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister.’” The word ηπφ must be masculine in form in order to conform in gender to “father.” Thus the word means “corruption.” (If the noun means “pit,” then it would be feminine, from ἴκσ, and this would not accord with the masculine “father.”) Therefore biblical Hebrew allows for the sense of “decay” in Psalm 16:10.

Three additional lines of evidence elucidate the use of ηπφ in Psalm 16:10. First, internal evidence supports the rendering “corruption.” As already noted, the verb ἴκσ (“to see”) here has the sense of experiencing. In this usage the verb naturally took as its object a noun of state (i.e., corruption) rather than a noun of place (i.e., pit).\(^6\) Other verses illustrate the usage of ἴκσ for experiencing a state. Psalm 89:48 uses this verb for experiencing death, Psalm 90:15 and Jeremiah 44:17 for experiencing evil, Jeremiah 20:18 for sorrow, Jeremiah 5:12 for famine, and Lamentations 3:1 for affliction. On the other hand, when Hebrew authors indicated a place such as the grave, the pit, or Sheol, they used verbs of motion such as to come (Job 5:26), to go (Eccles. 9:10; Isa. 38:10), to draw near (Pss. 88:3; 107:18), to descend (Job 21:13) or to fall (Pss. 7:15; 57:17).\(^6\) Significantly the terms for pit (ἀγη) and Sheol (ναζέ) were seldom the objects of the verb to see (ὑπί) with one exception being Genesis 21:19.\(^6\) However, twenty-three times Sheol was the object of the common verb of motion ἀρχ, (“to go down”).\(^6\) On the other


\(^6\) Also Waltke and Sutcliffe cite this passage as an illustration of the nominative masculine ηπφ meaning “corruption” (Sutcliffe, The Old Testament and the Future Life, 78; and Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113).


\(^6\) Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113.

\(^6\) This is contrary to Huckle, who says that “to see Sheol,” “to see the Pit,” and “to see death” are synonymous expressions (Huckle, “Psalm 16b: A Consideration,” 45).

\(^6\) Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Numbers 16:30, 33; 1 Samuel 2:6; 1 Kings 2:6, 9;
hand ην is the object of ἡρα in Psalm 49:9. Therefore the evidence from the use of ἡρα supports the translation “corruption,” a state rather than a place (“pit”).

However, some writers contend that the parallelism in Psalm 16:10 argues against the rendering “corruption.” Their contention is that ην is parallel to ἡραι and therefore ην, like ΠΚΊ, refers to a place.66 But this assumes that the verse has synonymous parallelism, whereas most of the psalm has synthetic parallelism.67 Second, parallelism, though an important interpretive tool, cannot be decisive in determining the meaning of a term. The fact that two terms are related in paired cola does not mean that they are equivalent.

For example in Psalm 36:10 God’s loyal love (цв) is paired with His righteousness (цв), but these attributes are not the same. In Psalm 16:10 ΠΚΊ denotes a place of death and ην denotes corruption, a state associated with death.

The second line of evidence in support of the rendering “corruption” is the translation in the ancient versions. The Septuagint renders ην in Psalm 16:10 with διαφθοράν, “corruption.” This is followed by all ancient versions with the exception of the Targum.68 Also many major English versions translate ην as “corruption” or “decay.”69

A third line of evidence in support of the translation “corruption” is the usage in Acts. Both Peter and Paul followed the Septuagint translation of διαφθοράν. Both apostles included the word as a part of the quotation, and they also repeated the word as part of their argument. “It is difficult to believe that Paul, conversant as he was with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as well as the Greek, would try to force a meaning upon a Hebrew word which

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67 See verses 1–5, 8–9. Verses 6–7 and 11 are likely synthetic. This simply shows that one may not assume synonymous parallelism in verse 10.


69 Examples include the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version.
was not really there.”70 Waltke agrees. “In this case, the ancient versions, not modern lexicographers, have the better of the argument, and so does the NT.”71

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be offered regarding the meaning of Psalm 16:10. This verse states the reason for David’s sense of security regarding his flesh (v. 9). The reason David’s flesh rested securely was that he knew that Yahweh would not desert him in the grave. This suggests that David expressed at least a veiled hope for resurrection: his flesh would not be abandoned in the grave. In the second line of the verse David extended the thought of the first colon by saying that Yahweh’s “favored one” would not experience decay. The language here seems to go beyond David himself. He did die and experience decay. In fact his death was part of the covenant God made with him (2 Sam. 7:12).

These conclusions leave three interpretive options. One view is that David used hyperbolic language that did not literally describe his experience. This is fairly common in the psalms and is often the case in typological messianic references. For example Psalm 34:20 states that the bones of a righteous man will not be broken. This hyperbolic language communicated the watchful care of God over the faithful. It did not, however, promise that no physical harm would come to followers of God. These words were literally fulfilled at Jesus’ crucifixion, when none of His bones were broken (John 19:36).72 However, Psalm 16:10 does not seem to be employing hyperbolic or metaphorical language. The first line of verse 10 expresses David’s hope for a physical resurrection, and the second line extends the thought to the “favored one’s” resurrection before decay.

A second view is that David employed the term ΤΟΠ to refer to a later recipient of the Davidic Covenant, namely, the Messiah.


72 The initial picture began with the unbroken bones of the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46). Both are perhaps in view here. John consistently portrayed Jesus as the Lamb of God, evoking the Passover imagery (cf. John 1:29). On the other hand the wording of John 19:36 follows Psalm 34:20 closely.
Since the description of a resurrection before decay clearly does not depict David's experience, one may conclude that he spoke of another. This other one was linked to David through the promises in the Davidic Covenant. David spoke of the resurrection of the ΤΩΝ, the Messiah, the ultimate recipient and fulfillment of the promise to David. This option holds that David spoke of resurrection, first of his own hope for a general resurrection and then of the resurrection of the ΤΩΝ, the Messiah.  

The third option is that David hoped for an ongoing physical preservation of his body after death. This view will be discussed in the next article in this series.

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73 For a detailed discussion of David's messianic awareness as it relates to this psalm see Trull, "Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32," 164-76.