

AN EXEGESIS OF PSALM 16:10*

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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 לְדָוִד 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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¹ Gregory V. Trull, "Views on Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (April–June 2004): 194–214.

² Column XXVII of the Psalms Scroll (11QPs²) describes David's prolific composition of psalms. The succeeding column then employs the לְדָוִד 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 מִן־הַמִּזְמוֹרֹת with Psalms 56–60, and each of these psalms bears the title לְדָוִד . 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Apart from a specified event in a superscription or a clear historical reference within a psalm, its background cannot be known with certainty.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

³ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 217; and Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Psalms*, trans. John Thomson and Patrick Fairbairn (Edinburgh: Clark, 1876), 3:230–31.

⁴ For more detailed discussion see Gregory V. Trull, "Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002): 67–72.

⁵ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 27–61.

⁶ Cf. W. A. M. Beuken, "Psalm 16: The Path to Life," *Bijdragen* 41 (1980): 373.

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 יָמֵי ("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

⁷ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 91.

VanGemerén say the verse refers to David's communion with God after death.⁸ Third, Weiser and Aparicio interpret verse 10 as referring to unbroken fellowship (without clarifying the mode).⁹ Fourth, many scholars hold that the verse means David expected to be preserved from an untimely death.¹⁰ Fifth, many other interpreters believe the verse speaks of personal resurrection from the dead.¹¹

⁸ Pierre G. Constant, "Les Citations du Psaume 16 dans les Actes des Apôtres" (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1989), 71; Charles A. Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 151; and Willem A. VanGemerén, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 158.

⁹ Angel Aparicio Rodríguez, *Tú Eres Mi Bien: Análisis Exegético y Teológico del Salmo 16. Aplicación a La Vida Religiosa* (Madrid: Clarentianas, 1993), 311, 315, 329; and Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 176–77.

¹⁰ Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:228; J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), 195; W. Robertson Smith, "The Sixteenth Psalm," *Expositor* 4 (1881): 358; Edward L. Curtis, "An Interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11," *Biblical World* 24 (1904): 114; S. R. Driver, "The Method of Studying the Psalter: Psalm XVI," *Expositor* 7 (1910): 33; Edmund F. Sutcliffe, *The Old Testament and the Future Life* (London: Oates and Washburne, 1946), 79–80; Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament*, trans. J. P. Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 152; Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 40; John J. Huckle, "Psalm 16:10b: A Consideration," *Dunwoodie Review* 4 (1964): 49; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1965; reprint, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 181; H. W. Boers, "Psalm 16 and the Historical Origin of the Christian Faith," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1969): 106; Armin Schmitt, "Ps 16, 8–11 als Zeugnis der Auferstehung in der Apg," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 17 (1973): 233–34; Donald A. Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 99; Donald Juel, "Social Dimensions of Exegesis: The Use of Psalm 16 in Acts 2," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 549; Leonard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 122; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 158; Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 173; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Columbus, OH: Augsburg, 1988), 240; and Robert B. Chisholm, "Theology of the Psalms," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 294.

¹¹ Moses Stuart, "Interpretation of Psalm XVI," *Biblical Repository* 1 (1831): 98; John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1878), 152; Alexander Francis Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 76; Alberti Vaccari, "Antica e Nuova Interpretazione del Salmo 15 (Volg. 15)," *Biblica* 14 (1933): 177; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 92; Rudolph P. Bierberg, "Conserva Me

Verse 10 is linked to verse 9 through the conjunction כִּי (“for, because”), which expresses a causal relationship between the two verses.¹² 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 עָזַב, “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 תָּעַזְבֵנוּ לְשֵׁאוֹל is synonymous with the Ugaritic *‘db larṣ*. 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 עָזַב and נָתַן (“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 עָזַב means that David asked to be taken into God’s presence rather than placed in Sheol.¹³ 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. He also does not address the broader biblical Hebrew usage of עָזַב. No other interpreters take up Dahood’s translation.¹⁴

Domine Psalm 16 (15)” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1945), 73–87; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 86; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Promise to David in Psalm 16 and Its Application in Acts 2:25–33 and 13:32–37,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980): 228; Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 181; and Bruce K. Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:1113.

¹² Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 640; and Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), §444, 72. See also Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 68–69.

¹³ Mitchell J. Dahood, “The Root עָזַב II in Job,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959): 308.

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 Exegético y Teológico del Salmo 16*, 329).

The term עָזַב more likely has the meaning of the first root “to forsake or abandon.”¹⁵ It often expresses Israel’s breaking of the covenant or Yahweh’s resulting judgment.¹⁶ 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 עָזַב means to be “left to the unseen world,” so that David “becomes its prey.” Delitzsch concludes that עָזַב refers to the avoidance of death. “It is therefore the hope of not dying, that is expressed by David in ver. 10.”¹⁷

The preposition לְ may be translated “to” in the sense of expressing motion toward something, or it may be translated “in” as a reference to location.¹⁸ 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”).¹⁹ The verb עָזַב normally takes only a direct object, but the indirect object construction here with לְ is not infrequent in the Old Testament. According to Bierberg, when לְ is employed in conjunction with עָזַב, the indirect object is always a person or something personified.²⁰ The sole exception noted by Bierberg is Job 39:14, where the construction describes the ostrich that abandons her eggs “in” the earth.²¹

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

¹⁵ Robert L. Alden, “עָזַב,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:364–65.

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 לְ in Job 39:14 means “in” (“The Root עָזַב II in Job,” 307–8).

“in.” He also cites evidence from synonyms of בְּיָד .²² Bierberg states that since there is no textual reason for personifying Sheol,²³ 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 (בְּיָד) to (לְ) 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 $\epsilon\lambda\varsigma$,²⁴ and in the Vulgate and Peshitta. All seem to support the rendering “in.”²⁵ The usage of לְ to indicate “in” was also quite common in Ugaritic.²⁶ 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 שְׁאוֹל referred to both the grave and also the netherworld.²⁷ It occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament. No clear cognates exist in other Semitic languages, and its etymology has been elusive.²⁸ Sheol is depicted as located underneath the earth

²² The synonyms are בְּיָד , בְּיָדָם , and בְּיָדָיִם (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 $\epsilon\lambda\varsigma$ “regularly connotes motion or action instead of rest” (Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 71 n. 12).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ William L. Moran, “The Hebrew Language in Its Northwest Semitic Background,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. George Ernest Wright (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 61.

²⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, “ שְׁאוֹל ,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 4:6. Merrill argues that the term more commonly refers to the netherworld, while Harris postulates that it refers only to the grave. See also Hans Bietenhard, “Hell,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 2:205–10.

²⁸ R. Laird Harris relates שְׁאוֹל to שָׁאַל , “ask” (“ שָׁאַל ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody, 1980], 2:891). For other views see Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 173; Merrill, “ שְׁאוֹל ,” 4:6; and Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, eds., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1274.

(Gen. 37:35; Job 7:9; Ezek. 31:15, 17; 32:27). Merrill observes that the common utilization of the Hiphil of ירד with שְׁאוֹל indicates that people were “brought down” to שְׁאוֹל against their will.²⁹ When שְׁאוֹל was personified, it was described as snatching away sinners (Job 24:19) or devouring them (Prov. 1:12). Personification of שְׁאוֹל was rare, however.³⁰ Harris argues that שְׁאוֹל 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.”³¹

Johnston, on the other hand, notes that of the forty-one times in which שְׁאוֹל 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).³² Johnston concludes that שְׁאוֹל 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 שְׁאוֹל 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 שְׁאוֹל is “almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment, whether the wicked, the afflicted righteous, or all sinners.”³³

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 שְׁאוֹל is the dark abode of departed spirits;

²⁹ Merrill, “שְׁאוֹל,” 4:6.

³⁰ Philip S. Johnston notes that instances cited as personification are actually a more general characterization. These include Job 24:19; Proverbs 1:12; 27:20; 30:16; Song of Solomon 8:6; Isaiah 5:14; Hosea 13:14; and Habakkuk 2:5 (“‘Left in Hell’? Psalm 16, Sheol and the Holy One,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterwaite [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 217). Merrill cites six examples of personification. Besides Job 24:19 the others are characterization (2 Sam. 22:6 [=Ps. 18:4]; Pss. 89:48; 141:7; Song of Sol. 8:6; Jon. 2:2).

³¹ R. Laird Harris, “The Meaning of the Term Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 4 (1961): 134.

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.*).

³³ Johnston, “‘Left in Hell?’” 219–20.

thus he emphasized that שְׁאוֹל is the grave.³⁴ He does not address the fact that in most cases שְׁאוֹל 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 שְׁאוֹל 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 שְׁאוֹל 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 שְׁאוֹל 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 נָתַן was used with the infinitive לִרְאוֹת ("to see") to give the sense of "allowing" or "permitting" (cf. Gen. 20:6; Ps. 121:3).³⁵ The word רָאָה 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).³⁶

The object of the verbal phrase "will not allow to see" is "Your Holy One" (or more literally, "Your favored one"). Should this term יְהוָה be understood in the active sense ("faithful one") or passive sense ("favored one")? This word is the adjectival form of יָהוּדָה,³⁷

³⁴ Harris, "The Meaning of the Term Sheol," 129, 134.

³⁵ Michael A. Grisanti, "נָתַן," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:205–11.

³⁶ Jakobus A. Naudé, "רָאָה," 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).³⁸ In the Psalms חַסֵּד almost exclusively describes the kindness of Yahweh toward His people.³⁹ The adjectival form חַסִּיד 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 חַסִּיד 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 (חַסֵּד) 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 חַסֵּד with the covenant He made with David. Yahweh promised David that His חַסֵּד 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 חַסֵּד extended to his line forever on the basis of the covenant (22:51). Solomon praised Yahweh for His חַסֵּד, 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 חַסֵּד He promised to David (2 Chron. 6:42).⁴⁰ Here the

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).

³⁸ R. Laird Harris, “חסד,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:305–7; and David A. Baer and Robert G. Gordon, “חסד,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2:211–18.

³⁹ Of the 129 occurrences of חַסֵּד 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).

⁴⁰ Though the term חַסֵּד was not directly related to the Davidic Covenant, the same concept is found in the synoptic account in 1 Kings 8:23–26.

term בְּרִית 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 בְּרִית (v. 24). These verses show that David and many writers who followed him inextricably linked the בְּרִית of Yahweh to David and the Davidic Covenant. Given the likelihood of a covenantal background for Psalm 16, the word בְּרִית ought to be understood as the recipient of Yahweh's בְּרִית as expressed in the Davidic Covenant.⁴¹

Whether בְּרִית 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 בְּרִית is translated "pit" or "corruption." He argues that to define בְּרִית 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 בְּרִית , 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

⁴¹ This is the view of Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Crowell, 1905; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1905), 313–43; Bierberg, "Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16," 72–73; Kaiser, "Promise to David in Psalm 16 and Its Application in Acts 2:25–33," 224–25; Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 835; and Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 200.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 200–201.

⁴³ Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 175–76.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

the integrity of their logic.⁴⁵ As Driver bluntly states, the Hebrew sense of the psalm “will not support the argument which the Apostles built upon it.”⁴⁶ 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.”⁴⁷ Waltke also illustrates the significance of this term, centering his interpretation of Psalm 16 around the meaning of קִיץ .⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ 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 קִיץ has one root or two.⁵⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs recognize only one possible root, namely, קִיץ , (“to sink down”), and they state that in Psalm 16:10 the noun means “pit.”⁵¹ Gesenius, however, states that קִיץ may stem from either קִיץ (“to ruin”) or קִיץ .⁵² The *Theological Wordbook of the Old*

⁴⁵ See Driver, “Method of Studying the Psalter: Psalm XVI,” 36; Boers, “Psalm 16 and the Historical Origin of the Christian Faith,” 106; Schmitt, “Ps 16, 8–11 als Zeugnis der Auferstehung in der Apg,” 234; and Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 181–82.

⁴⁶ Driver, “Method of Studying the Psalter: Psalm XVI,” 37.

⁴⁷ Chisholm, “Theology of the Psalms,” 294.

⁴⁸ Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1112–13.

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of the development of belief in the resurrection in the Old Testament see Trull, “Peter’s Use of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32,” 140–64.

⁵⁰ Held and Pope both acknowledge the uncertainty of current research in determining the root of קִיץ (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).

⁵¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 1001.

⁵² E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2d ed., trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §95k, 279.

Testament discusses the noun under both root headings. Harris concludes that some usages of רָחַשׁ refer to decay, but he says that the matter of one or two roots cannot be resolved.⁵³ Hamilton accepts the possibility of two roots, but he acknowledges the controversy surrounding the question.⁵⁴ The *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* also illustrates the difference in scholarly opinion. Merrill's article on רָחַשׁ 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.⁵⁵ In the same volume, though, Waltke argues in detail for a second root and for the rendering "corruption."⁵⁶

Philological evidence allows for the possibility of two distinct verbal roots producing nominal forms that are identical in appearance.⁵⁷

The possibility of a second root meaning "corruption" may also be supported in the writings of Qumran. Murphy argues that the noun רָחַשׁ 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 רָחַשׁ in the Qumran writings, but that the idea of corruption was certainly prevalent.⁵⁸ The philological evidence therefore allows for a nominal form from רָחַשׁ that means "corruption."

According to Bierberg the noun רָחַשׁ (Job 9:30–31; 17:13–15; 33:24, 28, 30; Pss. 55:24; 103:3–5; Ezek. 28:7–8) means corruption. The clearest passages are Job 17:14 and Psalm 55:24. In Psalm

⁵³ R. Laird Harris, "רָחַשׁ," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:910–11.

⁵⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, "רָחַשׁ," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:918.

⁵⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, "רָחַשׁ," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 4:93–94.

⁵⁶ Waltke, "Psalms: Theology of," 1112–13.

⁵⁷ If the noun רָחַשׁ derives from the verb רָחַשׁ , then the noun is feminine and the שׁ is the feminine suffix. Or if the noun רָחַשׁ derives from the verb רָחַשׁ , then the noun is masculine and שׁ is part of the root. Thus רָחַשׁ may produce a feminine nominative identical in form to a masculine nominative from רָחַשׁ , thus giving support to the view that רָחַשׁ stems from one of two verbal roots. An example similar to this is the noun רָחַשׁ , which comes from both the verb רָחַשׁ ("rest," as in Isa. 30:15) and from the verb רָחַשׁ ("descend," as in Isa. 30:30) (Bierberg, "Conserve Me Domine Psalm 16," 74–75; and Waltke, "Psalms: Theology of," 1113).

⁵⁸ Roland E. Murphy, "Sabbat in the Qumran Literature," *Biblica* 39 (1958): 61–66. In light of his findings Murphy concludes that the idea of corruption for רָחַשׁ in Psalm 16:10 came independently of the Septuagint.

55:24 שחַת is associated with בְּאֵר, a common term for pit, and Bierberg suggests that the phrase should be rendered “pit of corruption.”⁵⁹ Vaccari says “corruption” is required, because rendering the phrase “pit of the pit” would be impossible.⁶⁰

The usage of שחַת in Job 17:14 may be the most decisive example of the nominative form meaning “corruption.”⁶¹ The verse reads, “If I say to corruption [שחַת], ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister.’” The word שחַת 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 שחַת, 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 שחַת in Psalm 16:10. First, internal evidence supports the rendering “corruption.” As already noted, the verb רָאָה (“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).⁶² Other verses illustrate the usage of רָאָה 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).⁶³ Significantly the terms for pit (בְּאֵר) and Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) were seldom the objects of the verb to see (רָאָה) with one exception being Genesis 21:19.⁶⁴ However, twenty-three times Sheol was the object of the common verb of motion יָרַד (“to go down”).⁶⁵ On the other

⁵⁹ Cf. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, §66, 15.

⁶⁰ Vaccari, “Antica e Nuova Interpretazione del Risurrezione,” 420.

⁶¹ Also Waltke and Sutcliffe cite this passage as an illustration of the nominative masculine שחַת meaning “corruption” (Sutcliffe, *The Old Testament and the Future Life*, 78; and Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113).

⁶² Bierberg, “Conserva Me Domine Psalm 16,” 82; Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113; and Vaccari, “Antica e Nuova Interpretazione del Risurrezione,” 420.

⁶³ Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113.

⁶⁴ 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).

⁶⁵ Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Numbers 16:30, 33; 1 Samuel 2:6; 1 Kings 2:6, 9;

hand חַוָּת is the object of רָאָה in Psalm 49:9. Therefore the evidence from the use of רָאָה 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 חַוָּת is parallel to שְׂאוֹל and therefore חַוָּת , like שְׂאוֹל , 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 (חַסֵּד) is paired with His righteousness (צְדִקָּה), but these attributes are not the same. In Psalm 16:10 שְׂאוֹל denotes a place of death and חַוָּת 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 חַוָּת 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 חַוָּת 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

Job 7:9; 17:16; Psalm 55:15; Proverbs 5:5; 7:27; Isaiah 5:14; 14:11, 14; Ezekiel 31:15–17; 32:21, 27; and Amos 9:2. Merrill makes this general observation regarding Sheol (“שְׂאוֹל,” 4:6).

⁶⁶ Paul A. Birmingham, “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Psalm 16” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980), 63; and Smith, “The Sixteenth Psalm,” 354. See also Bierberg’s brief discussion of similar positions by Briggs, Crampton, Perennes, Wutz, Bird, and Lattey (Bierberg, “Conserua Me Domine Psalm 16,” 83–84).

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.

⁶⁸ Bierberg, “Conserua Me Domine Psalm 16,” 81.

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 מָשִׁיחַ to refer to a later recipient of the Davidic Covenant, namely, the Messiah.

⁷⁰ Everett F. Harrison, “The Christian Doctrine of Resurrection” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1938), 22.

⁷¹ Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” 1113. See also Laurenz Reinke, *Die Messianischen Psalmen*, vol. 1 (Giessen, Germany: Roth, 1857), 179; and Vaccari, “Antica e Nuova Interpretazione del Risurrezione,” 417–20.

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 מָשִׁיחַ, 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 מָשִׁיחַ, the Messiah.⁷³

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.

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.



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