

# PETER'S INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 16:8–11 IN ACTS 2:25–32\*

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**T**HE NEW TESTAMENT REFERS to Old Testament passages in a variety of ways. These include the Sarah-Hagar allegory of Galatians 4, the muzzled ox analogy of 1 Corinthians 9, the faith of Abraham illustration in Romans 4, and a host of others. Both Peter (in Acts 2:27) and Paul (in 13:35) based their argument about Jesus' resurrection on Psalm 16:10. These two sermons distill the apostolic message proclaimed by the two key leaders of the early church. Therefore Psalm 16:10 serves as a critical theological support for Christ's resurrection in two key proclamations of the gospel in Acts.

Psalm 16:10 stands apart from many Old Testament quotations in the New Testament because of Peter's inspired commentary. Many Old Testament passages are utilized without detailed explanation of how the New Testament writers understood the original context. In this case, however, Peter offered several insights into his perspective on the original meaning of Psalm 16:10.

## SETTING AND OVERVIEW OF PETER'S SERMON

The setting of Peter's sermon (Acts 2:1–13) has four important background elements. First, the nations represented at Pentecost (vv. 9–11) foreshadow the universal spread of the gospel in the remainder of Acts. Second, Peter's sermon expressed the "wonders of God"<sup>1</sup> being spoken by the disciples (v. 11). This includes the wonder of the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus. Third, the coming of the Holy Spirit, which enabled the believers there to tes-

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

tify of Jesus in unlearned languages, raised questions in the minds of some (vv. 7–8, 12–13) that Peter utilized as an opportunity to speak of Jesus' exaltation. Fourth, the false claim of drunkenness (v. 13) gave Peter an opportunity (vv. 17–21) to explain the true source of the phenomena as prophesied in Joel 2. These elements give the necessary backdrop for Peter's Christological argument of Jesus as Messiah and Lord (v. 36).

Many commentators on Peter's Pentecost sermon point out its threefold structure.<sup>2</sup> First is Peter's refutation of the charge of drunkenness and the explanation of the Spirit's descent (vv. 14–21), as prophesied by Joel. Second is Peter's Christological argument (vv. 22–36), which includes the attestation of Jesus through His earthly works (v. 22), His resurrection (including the quotation of Ps. 16), and His exaltation (Acts 2:33–35). Some divide this portion after verse 28, based on the repetition of a direct address in verse 29 (*ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί*).<sup>3</sup> However, this breaks the resurrection argument Peter was building. Instead, the repeated address introduces and emphasizes Peter's crucial interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11. One might also see a new division beginning at Acts 2:32, but this too separates the arguments for Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. Peter, however, linked the two together in his conclusion (v. 36). The third major section is the response of the crowd and Peter's call to repentance (vv. 37–39).

Peter's sermon exhibits a strong unifying element. The quotation of Joel 2 begins with a reference to the coming of the Spirit and closes with salvation offered to all who call on the Lord (Acts 2:17, 21). Peter demonstrated that the exalted Lord of Psalm 110 brought the Holy Spirit (vv. 33–35). Also Peter concluded by exhorting the crowd to call in repentance on the one whom God has made "Lord" (v. 36).<sup>4</sup> This "Lord," who is mentioned at the end of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1995), 132–33; Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 31–32; George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 117; Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 358; Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 274; Eduard Schweizer, "Concerning the Speeches in Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (New York: Abingdon, 1966), 208; and Albert Vernon Clock, "The Argument of the Book of Acts" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1956), 34.

<sup>3</sup> For example see Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 133.

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Brawley suggests that "Lord" in Acts 2:39 is linked to the reference to

the Joel passage, is the risen and exalted Lord of Psalms 16 and 110, and the source of salvation (Acts 2:36–38). Thus the Joel quotation in verse 21 and subsequent allusions to it in verses 38–39 unify Peter’s message.

### THE TEXT OF THE PSALM 16 QUOTATION

Scholars have pointed out three places in Psalm 16 where the Septuagint translators allegedly veered from the meaning of the Hebrew words. First, in verse 9 ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι (“in hope”) translates תְּבִיבָה. Some say this allows for a resurrection understanding in verse 10. Steyn, agreeing with Schmitt and Boer, says that in this translation the Septuagint translators imposed their own belief in the resurrection.<sup>5</sup> Steyn argues that changing the emphasis from security (תְּבִיבָה) to hope (ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι) permits the translation of “corruption” in verse 10.<sup>6</sup> Bock, however, agreeing with Rese, sees this change as “not decisive for a new understanding of the text.”<sup>7</sup> The broader sense of the psalm determines whether this translation points to preservation or resurrection.

The most debated Septuagint translation in Psalm 16 is διαφθοράν (“corruption,” rather than “pit”) for תְּבִיבָה (v. 10). Steyn states that it made possible a bodily resurrection that was not found in the Hebrew text.<sup>8</sup> He notes, however, that the Septuagint consistently renders both the noun תְּבִיבָה and the verb תְּבִיבָה with the idea of διαφθορά. He sees these as “changed consciously or unconsciously by the Septuagint translators” with a rendering that is not called for in the Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> Bock, on the other hand, sees this ren-

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“Lord” in the Septuagint that immediately follows Peter’s quoted portion of Joel 2. This ellipsis is filled in by later discussion (*Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995], 84–85). This is certainly possible, since Peter did not quote the final line of Psalm 16 about the right hand of God. This thought is then picked up in Peter’s discussion of Psalm 110.

<sup>5</sup> Gert Jacobus Steyn, “Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum,” in *Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology*, ed. T. Baarda, A. van der Kooij and A. S. van der Woude (Kampen: Pharos, 1995), 106.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 172–73.

<sup>8</sup> Steyn, “Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum,” 107.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

dering as a “conscious Septuagint word-play. . . . The alteration would emerge conceptually, not linguistically.”<sup>10</sup> The translation comes from the Hebrew context, not from the Septuagint translators’ theology. The rendering of *διαφθοράν* for  $\text{תקש}$  is not, however, a change at all. As discussed in part two in this series, the idea of corruption for  $\text{תקש}$  is in fact the preferred rendering.<sup>11</sup> Thus *διαφθοράν* represents an accurate representation of the Hebrew meaning.

The third translation issue relates to the previous two. Bock notes that *ὁδοὺς ζωῆς* (“ways of life”) for  $\text{אֶרֶךְ יָיִם}$  (“path of life,” v. 11) is “not regarded as decisive in itself.”<sup>12</sup> Steyn notes that the Masoretic text emphasizes “a life to which God responds,” whereas the Septuagint conveys the idea of eternal life.<sup>13</sup> Bock rightly observes that the Septuagint does not do injustice to the Hebrew text. The sense of the phrase “depends on how one views the whole Psalm’s context and its conceptual frame of reference.”<sup>14</sup>

The three proposed significant differences between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint prove not to be differences after all. The first and third translations vary from the Hebrew text only if the psalm does not speak of resurrection. The decisive rendering concerns the use of *διαφθοράν* for  $\text{תקש}$ . As demonstrated earlier,<sup>15</sup> corruption is the proper sense of  $\text{תקש}$  and therefore *διαφθοράν* is a correct rendering.

#### PETER’S INTRODUCTION OF PSALM 16:8–11

Much of Peter’s interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11 surfaces in his commentary that follows its citation (Acts 2:29–32). However, certain key facets of Peter’s understanding rise from his introduction to it in verses 24–25. Peter introduced the Psalm 16 quotation with three significant statements about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. First, God raised Him from the dead. Second, it was not possible for death to hold Jesus. Third, David spoke of the Messiah.

<sup>10</sup> Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 175–76.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory V. Trull, “An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July–September 2004): 304–21.

<sup>12</sup> Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 176.

<sup>13</sup> Steyn, “Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum,” 108.

<sup>14</sup> Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 176.

<sup>15</sup> Trull, “An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10.”

Jesus' resurrection was a result of God's direct intervention. Peter argued that Jesus' crucifixion was a part of God's overall plan of salvation (v. 23). Acts consistently reflects God's sovereign accomplishment of His design.<sup>16</sup> This focus also applies to Jesus' resurrection, in which Peter emphasized that the key actor was God the Father. As Barrett states, "Jesus indeed rose, but he rose because he was raised."<sup>17</sup> The term for "raised," ἀνέστησεν, is from ἀνίστημι. This is the most common expression for Jesus' resurrection in Acts (2:32; 3:26; 13:33; 17:31).<sup>18</sup> Jesus died according to God's plan, and He also was raised to life by God's intervention. The imagery Peter employed to describe the Resurrection, "freeing him from the agony of death" (λύσας τὰς ὀδύνας τοῦ θανάτου), likely alludes to 2 Samuel 22:6; Psalms 18:5 and 116:3 in the Septuagint. The Greek phrase τὰς ὀδύνας refers to pain, most often birth pangs (1 Sam. 4:19; Job 39:2). The Hebrew term in these passages is חבל, "cord." Some hold that the Septuagint translators misread חבל as from חבל, meaning "pains."<sup>19</sup> Others argue that the term ὀδύνας means "cords."<sup>20</sup> Bock suggests that the Septuagint makes a "conscious word-play" in these texts. The three passages (2 Sam. 22:6; Pss. 18:5; 116:3) convey the idea of pain associated with death. Therefore the mixed metaphor describes death as "a painful entrapment of a person."<sup>21</sup>

Strauss comes to a similar conclusion, maintaining that ὀδύνη can mean pain in general, not just birth pangs (Exod. 15:14; Deut. 2:25; Job 21:17). Further, neither the Septuagint nor the context of Acts 2:24 includes the idea of birth pangs. Therefore the term most likely refers to pain, specifically the pain of death. However, since the verse later alludes to death's "hold" (κρατεῖσθαι) on Jesus, the

<sup>16</sup> This important theme is seen in the use of βουλῆ (2:23; 4:28; 5:38–39; 13:36; 20:27) and θέλημα (21:14; 22:14) regarding God's plan. Acts also implies God's plan through the usage of δεῖ or εἶδει (1:16, 21; 3:21; 4:12; 5:29; 9:6, 16; 14:22; 15:5; 16:30; 17:3; 19:21; 20:35; 23:11; 24:19; 25:10; 27:24). Acts also describes events as predetermined by God (10:42; 17:31; 22:14; 26:16). See David Peterson, "The Motif of Fulfillment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 86.

<sup>17</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 1:143.

<sup>18</sup> Other expressions in Acts for the Resurrection include ἐγείρω (3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 37) and the intransitive use of ἀνίστημι (10:41; 17:3).

<sup>19</sup> Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Bratcher, "Having Loosed the Pangs of Death," *Bible Translator* 10 (1959): 18–20.

<sup>21</sup> Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 171–72.

metaphor of “cords” may also be appropriate. Strauss concludes that Luke used this mixed metaphor to “introduce the twin themes that Jesus is freed from his anguish when death is compelled to release him.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the difficulty in the metaphor the sense of Acts 2:24a is clear. God raised Jesus from the dead. Death’s power, seen in both the pain it brings and its entangling grasp, was unable to hold Jesus.

The second statement used by Peter in verse 24 to introduce the Psalm 16 quotation emphasizes that it was impossible for Jesus to remain among the dead. Jesus had to be raised because (*καθότι*) death could not hold Him.<sup>23</sup> The word *καθότι* is found only six times in the New Testament, all in Luke’s writings. Three times the word means “according as” (2:45; 4:35; 17:31), and here the sense is best rendered “because” (a similar sense is in Luke 1:7 and 19:9).<sup>24</sup> It was impossible for Jesus to remain dead because David had prophesied that Messiah would rise from the dead. This connection is seen in the use of the explanatory *γάρ* in verse 25. This conjunction indicates that the prophecy of David in Psalm 16:8–11 is the reason death could not hold Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

The logic of the first two introductory statements may be summarized as follows. After Peter had affirmed that God attested to Jesus by His “miracles, wonders, and signs” (Acts 2:22), and that Jesus’ death was a part of God’s sovereign plan (v. 23), Peter showed that Jesus’ resurrection was necessary because death could not hold the Messiah (v. 24). And the reason death could not hold the Messiah was that David foretold His resurrection (v. 25).

In the third introductory statement (v. 25) Peter declared that David spoke of the Messiah in Psalm 16:8–11. The construction of this introductory phrase “David said [*λέγει*] about [*εἰς*] him,” is unique in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup> Though both *λέγω* and *εἰς* are quite common, they do not often occur together. The closest exam-

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<sup>22</sup> Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 136–37.

<sup>23</sup> Verse 25 gives the reason for this impossibility.

<sup>24</sup> Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 151; and H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 213, 243.

<sup>26</sup> It is unique in that no other Old Testament quotation is introduced in this way. But similar constructions do occur, as seen in the discussion that follows.

ples are in Luke 22:65; John 8:26;<sup>27</sup> and Ephesians 5:32. The similar construction in Luke 22:65 (ἐλεγον εἰς αὐτόν) describes how the guards spoke blasphemies against Jesus. The clause in John 8:26 (“I tell the world,” λαλῶ εἰς τὸν κόσμον) depicts Jesus addressing the world in His speech. In Ephesians 5:32 Paul explained that in his description of proper marital relationships, he was actually speaking of Christ’s relationship with the church (λέγω εἰς Χριστόν). However, the senses of the clauses in Luke 22:65 and John 8:26 do not match the Acts 2:25 context. Luke 22:65 refers to speaking against someone, and John 8:26 describes speaking to something. David spoke neither against nor to the Messiah.

In Ephesians 5:32, which seems close to Acts 2:25, Paul used εἰς to indicate this referent. Winer understands this to be the sense in Acts 2:25. He concludes that it points to the direction of David’s thoughts. He renders the preposition “aiming at” or “referring to.”<sup>28</sup> Louw and Nida interpret εἰς similarly in Acts 2:25. They describe this usage as one of the “markers of content as a means of specifying a particular referent.”<sup>29</sup> The Greek grammars by Abbott-Smith and Robertson include a similar usage of εἰς.<sup>30</sup> Kaiser states, “Acts 2:25 carefully introduces the quotation from Ps 16:8–11 with the phrase, ‘David says with reference to (εἰς) him,’ rather than ‘concerning (περὶ) him’ (which would have meant that the total reference was of the Messiah alone).”<sup>31</sup> However, the lack of informative parallels to the λεγῶ + εἰς construction and the wide range of

<sup>27</sup> The verb in John 8:26 is λαλέω. It is included because of its close relation to λέγω. No other verb of speaking is used with εἰς in a construction similar to that in Acts 2:25.

<sup>28</sup> For similar usages of εἰς George Benedict Winer cites Ephesians 1:10; 5:32; and Hebrews 7:14 (*A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament Prepared as a Solid Basis for the Interpretation of the New Testament*, 7th ed., trans. Gottlieb Lünemann [Andover, MD: Draper, 1883], 397).

<sup>29</sup> They include Romans 16:19 as a similar example (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], 1:90.23). This is also the conclusion of Dana and Mantey (*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 103).

<sup>30</sup> G. Abbott-Smith renders the preposition “in regard to,” but he does not discuss Acts 2:25 or the use of the preposition with verbs of speaking (*A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1937], 133). A. T. Robertson cites Acts 2:25 as an example of εἰς serving essentially the function of a dative, that is, setting forth a disposition (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3d ed. [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923], 594).

<sup>31</sup> 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.

uses for *εἰς* do not seem to allow for such precise distinctions. The context must ultimately define the sense of this introductory statement.<sup>32</sup> This introductory phrase (*Δαυὶδ γὰρ λέγει εἰς αὐτόν*) therefore serves to point to the Messiah as the referent of David's speech in Psalm 16:8–11. But neither the construction of the phrase nor the preposition specifies whether the Messiah was the *exclusive* referent or the *ultimate* (though shared) referent.

Peter's introduction of the Psalm 16:8–11 passage provides three relevant statements about his understanding of the passage. The first two statements combine to declare that Jesus' resurrection was necessary because death could not hold the Messiah by virtue of David's prophecy. The third introductory statement supports the first two by clarifying that David referred to the Messiah when he wrote Psalm 16:8–11.

#### PETER'S COMMENTARY ON PSALM 16:8–11

Following Peter's quotation of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–28 he explained that David was speaking not of himself, but of the Messiah (vv. 29–32). Peter made five important declarations that demonstrate the messianic reference in the psalm. First, Peter referred to the presence of David's tomb as proof that David could not have been speaking of his own physical resurrection. Second, David could speak of the future Messiah because David was a prophet. Third, David could speak of the Messiah because the Davidic Covenant involved a messianic hope. Fourth, David had prophetic insight into the future appearance of the Messiah. Fifth, Peter asserted that David spoke of the Messiah's resurrection in Psalm 16, specifically verse 10b. These five declarations are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Peter's first declaration was that David's entombed remains demonstrate that David could not have been speaking of his own resurrection (Acts 2:29). David's tomb was mentioned as part of the description Nehemiah gave of the reconstruction of the wall after the Jews returned from the Exile (Neh. 3:16). According to Josephus, John Hyrcanus spoiled the tomb of three thousand talents of silver during the siege of Jerusalem in 135/134 B.C.<sup>33</sup> Josephus wrote that later Herod stocked his own coffers by taking gold furni-

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<sup>32</sup> Strauss states that the context demonstrates that this introductory phrase means that David "was speaking prophetically in the voice of Messiah" (*The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 137).

<sup>33</sup> Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 13.249; and idem, *The Jewish Wars* 1.61.



ture and other valuable items from David's tomb. When two of Herod's soldiers attempted to search further into the tomb and disturb the body of David, a flame burst out and killed them. Herod then built a large monument in an attempt to make right his violation.<sup>34</sup> Josephus's account of the flame of judgment cannot be substantiated, but likely his description of the monument is reliable. If this is the case, this monument would have been standing in Peter's day. According to Dio Cassius David's tomb and monument were not destroyed until Hadrian's campaign around A.D. 133.<sup>35</sup> On the Day of Pentecost David had been dead and buried for a millennium.

The presence of David's remains in his tomb demonstrated that David did not speak of his own resurrection. If David had spoken of a resurrection of all the righteous, the force of Peter's argument would have been blunted. True, David will be raised, but Psalm 16:10 describes a resurrection before decay, a specific rather than a general resurrection. The decay of David's corpse proves that he did not speak of himself; his experience did not fulfill the words of Psalm 16:10. In contrast to David's grave Jesus' tomb stood empty. His undecayed body had been raised to life by God the Father.

The line of argument Peter employed here parallels his later logic that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Peter had declared that God's work through Jesus attested to His identity (Acts 2:22). He then argued that Jesus' resurrection proves He is the Messiah. Later Peter stated that the giving of the Holy Spirit resulted from Jesus' exaltation (vv. 34–35), and he concluded that God had made Jesus both Lord and Messiah (v. 36). Jesus was not made Messiah because of His works or His resurrection and exaltation. Instead these key events evidenced who He already was. Jesus worked signs and was resurrected and exalted because He was already the Messiah. The death and decay of David did not change the sense or referent of the psalm passage. His tomb proved what was always true, that David did not speak of himself. In this way Peter showed that David was not the referent of Psalm 16:10b. The introductory phrase (*Δαυὶδ γὰρ λέγει εἰς αὐτόν*) pointed to the Messiah as David's referent, but it did not specify Him as sole referent. Now Peter began to separate David the psalmist from Messiah the sole referent.

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<sup>34</sup> Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 16.179–82.

<sup>35</sup> Dio Cassius 64.14. See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 93–94.

The second, third, and fourth declarations (vv. 30–31) by Peter connect grammatically to the summative fifth declaration. The three statements are participles: being (*ὑπάρχων*) a prophet, knowing (*εἰδώς*) of God's promise to him, and foreseeing (*προιδών*) the future Messiah. They provide the basis for Peter's conclusion that David spoke (*ἐλάλησεν*) of Messiah's resurrection (v. 31).<sup>36</sup>

Peter's second declaration (v. 30) that David spoke Psalm 16 as a prophet is introduced by the conjunction *οὖν*. The New American Standard Bible translates the word inferentially, "and so, because," while the New International Version renders it adversatively, "but." Dana and Mantey explain that when the conjunction is used inferentially, the inference is expressed by the main verb rather than by an infinitive or participle.<sup>37</sup> The *οὖν* then points to the main verb *ἐλάλησεν* ("spoke," v. 31) as a result of the three causal participles (*ὑπάρχων, εἰδώς, προιδών*).

Marshall and Johnson both point out that Luke assumed that the psalmists were prophets. They note passages where prophecy seems implicit in a psalm (Mark 12:36; Luke 20:41–42; 24:44; Acts 1:16, 20; 4:25; 13:33–36).<sup>38</sup> In addition the designation of prophet for David was not a New Testament novelty. Fitzmyer points out that in first-century Palestine David was recognized as a prophet.<sup>39</sup> In a Hebrew text published by Sanders, 11QPs<sup>a</sup> 27:2–11, David was associated with prophecy.<sup>40</sup> The Psalms Scroll contains about one-third of the canonical psalms mixed with some apocryphal psalms. A prose insertion into the collection summarizes David's prodigious writing and then closes by saying that David "spoke through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High."<sup>41</sup>

Fitzmyer notes that it is difficult to ascertain with clarity the Qumran concept of a prophet, but it "would seem to be a divine gift resembling the biblical prophetic inspiration of old, and in virtue of

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<sup>36</sup> The first two statements are linked by *οὖν* and the third affirmation *προιδών* modifies the main verb *ἐλάλησεν* as a causal participle.

<sup>37</sup> Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 76–77; and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 51.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "David 'Being Therefore a Prophet . . .,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972): 332–39.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 134–37.

<sup>41</sup> 11QPs<sup>a</sup> 27:11.

this David composed his psalms and songs.<sup>42</sup> Fitzmyer also suggests that David may have been viewed in Qumran literature as a prophet because of the association of prophecy with the “anointed ones.”<sup>43</sup> The Old Testament often referred to David as the “anointed one” (2 Sam. 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; Pss. 20:6; 89:20), and Qumran literature applies the term “anointed one(s)” to the prophets in 1QM 11:7, 6QD 3:4, and CD 2:12.<sup>44</sup> Fitzmyer admits that, though this link is plausible, it is “remote.”<sup>45</sup>

Josephus described David’s anointing by Samuel in terms similar to Saul’s. “But the Divine Power departed from Saul, and removed to David, who upon this removal of the Divine Spirit to him, began to prophesy.”<sup>46</sup> Josephus, a contemporary of Peter or Luke, likely recorded a perception of David that existed in first-century Israel.<sup>47</sup>

Josephus’s description of David’s prophesying after he was anointed by Samuel may be a logical inference from the Old Testament narrative. After Saul was anointed by Samuel, Saul prophesied when the Spirit came on him (1 Sam. 10:6, 10). Later the Spirit departed from Saul and came on David (16:13–14). The descriptions of the coming of the Spirit on Saul and David are similar in wording. One might conclude that the Spirit, who moved Saul to prophesy, was given to David, and David could therefore be seen as a prophet. In his final words David himself recognized that it was the Spirit who spoke through him (2 Sam. 23:1–2).

The description of David as a prophet in Acts 2:30 was therefore not in discord with first-century belief or Old Testament statements. The Qumran literature and Josephus attest that first-century Jews recognized David as a prophet. Though the Old Testament never specifically calls David a prophet (נָבִיא),<sup>48</sup> the descriptions of Saul’s and David’s anointings may imply that David was given a prophetic ability.

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42 Fitzmyer, “David ‘Being Therefore a Prophet . . . ,’” 337.

43 Ibid., 337–38.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 337.

46 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 6.166.

47 Fitzmyer, “David ‘Being Therefore a Prophet . . . ,’” 338.

48 David is called a “man of God” (2 Chron. 8:14; Neh. 12:24, 36), a common Old Testament designation for a prophet, but these passages emphasize David’s role in leading worship. Therefore the phrase “man of God” describes David’s love and loyalty to Yahweh.

Peter's third declaration concerning Psalm 16:8–11 is that David could speak of the Messiah because he knew God would place one of David's descendants on his throne (Acts 2:30). Peter introduced the content of David's knowledge (*εἰδώς*) with *ὅτι*.<sup>49</sup> The word *οἶδα*, "to know," is virtually synonymous with *γινώσκω*.<sup>50</sup> A slight distinction may be found in that *οἶδα* refers to "knowledge which may serve as a basis for further thought and action." In this case *οἶδα* functions much like the perfect tense of *γινώσκω*.<sup>51</sup> Abbott-Smith distinguishes *οἶδα* from *γινώσκω* by defining the latter as knowledge gained through experience and observation, while the former is knowledge gained by reflective processes.<sup>52</sup> This slight distinction fits well with the use of *οἶδα* in Acts 2:30. The knowledge of the implications of the Davidic Covenant formed the basis of David's words in Psalm 16:8–11.

The *ὅτι* clause denotes David's knowledge as an understanding of a future descendant who will reign on his throne. The clause alludes to Psalm 132:11, a poetic reflection and plea based on 2 Samuel 7.<sup>53</sup> This allusion to Psalm 132 and ultimately back to the Davidic Covenant demonstrates that David had some knowledge of the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. "To be sure, these references indicate that David would be the father of a line of kings, the throne would remain in his family and not be taken over by usurpers from some other family. Nevertheless, Peter takes it that one descendant is in mind."<sup>54</sup> According to Peter, Christ's resurrection was necessary in order for Him to rule on the throne promised to David. David's prophetic words sprang then from his knowledge of God's promise. The question arises whether David actually knew the messianic implications of the covenant or whether his language

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49 This construction is common in the New Testament (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 556).

50 H. Seesemann, "οἶδα," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 116–17.

51 E. Schütz, "Knowledge," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 2:391.

52 Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 92–93.

53 Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 94; Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 77; Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 52; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 114; and Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech*, 85.

54 Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 77.

simply enabled Peter to assert this fact.<sup>55</sup>

Peter's assertion that David knew of an ultimate son on his throne likely stems from two sources. Though one cannot presume to read Peter's mind, his written expression discloses two key points. One point is that David's knowledge was prophetic.<sup>56</sup> Peter had already said in Acts 2:30 that David spoke Psalm 16:8–11 as a prophet. In Acts 2:31 Peter said that when David prophesied of the Messiah's resurrection, he saw "what was ahead." In Psalm 16:7 David had said that God gave him intimate instruction. David did have significant knowledge of God's plan. The coupling of this prophetic knowledge with David's having received the Davidic Covenant led him to conclude that the fulfillment of the covenant entailed more than a long reign of kings.

The other point is that David had knowledge of a messianic figure. Peter followed his declaration about Psalm 16 with the prophecy by David in Psalm 110.<sup>57</sup> David was aware of a King greater than himself. This King would be exalted at the Father's right hand until all enemies were made His footstool (110:1). David received a promise of an enduring dynasty. David saw the ultimate King at the place of honor at the Father's right hand. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise will be in this King. Peter's argument was not that David's language allowed *Peter* to assert knowledge of the covenant implications, but that David's personal covenantal and prophetic knowledge allowed *him* to speak of the supreme implication of God's promise. Peter then proclaimed that this supreme implication, the resurrection of the Messiah, had been fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>58</sup>

Peter's third declaration, therefore, is that David's awareness of the messianic implications of the Davidic Covenant contributed to his prophesying of the Messiah's resurrection. Though the exact content of David's knowledge is not known,<sup>59</sup> he did have insight as a prophet (Acts 2:30). He also had awareness of the מָשִׁיחַ who would

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<sup>55</sup> Bock takes this second alternative, stating that David's language foresaw the fulfillment of the covenant (*Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*, 177).

<sup>56</sup> The general question of what prophets knew when they prophesied will be addressed in the subsequent discussion of προειδών (v. 31).

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion of Old Testament evidence of David's messianic awareness see Gregory V. Trull, "Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 164–76.

<sup>58</sup> The connection here of Jesus' resurrection to the eternal throne is similar to the connection of His resurrection to His eternal priesthood in Hebrews 7:15–17.

<sup>59</sup> Fuller discussion of David's messianic awareness is given in *ibid.*, 164–76.

be raised and of a Lord greater than himself who would be the ultimate King (Ps. 110). This insight and awareness allowed David to grasp that the covenant given to him would find its supreme fulfillment in a single eternal King.

Peter's fourth declaration concerning Psalm 16:8–11 is that David foresaw and spoke of the Messiah's resurrection. Peter said that David's resurrection prophecy is linked to this foresight.

The term for "foreseeing" is *προιδών*, from *προοράω*, which occurs only four times in the New Testament (Acts 2:25, 31; 21:29; Gal. 3:8). In Acts 2:25 it means "to see before one's eyes."<sup>60</sup> In Acts 21:29 it means having seen someone previously. Galatians 3:8 says that Scripture foresaw (*προιδούσα*) that God would justify the Gentiles. Michaelis says *προοράω* in both Galatians 3:8 and Acts 2:31 means "advance knowledge." In David's case his role as a prophet allowed him "to know in advance" of the Messiah's resurrection.<sup>61</sup>

The question of what the prophets understood of their prophecies cannot be answered with certainty and is beyond the scope of this study. However, Peter noted that David as a prophet knew in some way the implications of the Davidic Covenant and, foreseeing this, he prophesied that the Messiah would be raised from the dead.

First Peter 1:10–11 states that the prophets "searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances [*τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν*] to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." Kaiser renders the Greek phrase ("person or time," NASB) as either an emphatic tautology ("time") or as time described ("time and kind of time").<sup>62</sup> He concludes that the prophets understood their prophecies except for the time when they would be fulfilled. Kaiser says this passage shows that the prophets knew of the sufferings of Christ, the glories of Christ, the order of His suffering and glory, and that they as prophets spoke to a future generation (v. 12).<sup>63</sup> However, the passage does not say that the prophets understood Christ's suffering and glory; Peter simply wrote that they spoke of it. In fact many commentators offer this passage as support for the idea that the prophets often spoke

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<sup>60</sup> W. Michaelis, "*προοράω*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5:381.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Kaiser, "The Promise to David in Psalm 16 and Its Application in Acts 2:25–33 and 13:32–37," 95.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

of things they did not understand.<sup>64</sup> From 1 Peter 1:10–12 one can conclude that David knew he spoke concerning the future when he prophesied of the resurrection of the Messiah. And Acts 2:31 affirms that David had foreknowledge of Messiah's resurrection.

In summarizing Peter's statements about David's awareness of the significance of his own words, three points may be made. First, David as a prophet had some kind of future insight, though its details cannot be known. Second, David's prophetic insight was aided by his understanding of the covenant given him by the Lord. This included the awareness that the covenant would culminate in a messianic figure to rule eternally on David's throne. Third, David's foresight was linked to his prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection. This implies recognition on David's part. If David had no foresight related to the Messiah's resurrection, the inclusion of the modifying *προϊδών* is superfluous. Therefore, though one cannot know David's thoughts when he wrote Psalm 16:8–11 (beyond his written expression), one may conclude that David had sufficient insight into the future to allow him to tell of the resurrection of the Messiah.

Peter's fifth declaration about David's prophecy focuses the apostle's argument on part of the psalm quotation. Though Peter quoted Psalm 16:8–11, in Acts 2:31 he focused on verse 10 for his argument.<sup>65</sup> He repeated the two lines of verse 10 exactly except for two changes. The first is the change of the two verbs to the aorist tense ("He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay"). He did this to indicate that the action had already occurred.<sup>66</sup> The second change is the replacing of *τὸν ὄσιόν* (ὄσιον) with *ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ*. This focuses the passage on the Messiah's body. Peter's point in citing Psalm 16:10 is that the verse prophesied that Messiah would neither be abandoned in the grave nor experience physical decay. As already noted, David's tomb demonstrated that *his* body had decayed. Of course God will raise David

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<sup>64</sup> See for example R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 46; Edwin A. Blum, "1, 2 Peter," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 222; and Roger M. Raymer, "1 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, 842.

<sup>65</sup> The opening paragraph of the quotation section (above) addresses the possible reasons for Peter's quoting of verses 8–11.

<sup>66</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 95; David J. Williams, *Acts*, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 52; and Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 148.

in a future resurrection; he is not abandoned to the grave *forever*. The Messiah, however, would not only be rescued from the grave, but He would also be rescued before His body suffered decay. In this way David is differentiated from his ultimate seed, the Messiah. In the Old Testament this physical decay is related to the מְצִיחַ (“favored one”) in verse 10b. In the psalm David shifted from a first-person pronoun in verse 10a (“my soul”) to the third person מְצִיחַ in verse 10b.<sup>67</sup> The word מְצִיחַ extends beyond David to his seed, the Messiah, and the resurrection also extends beyond David to the unique experience of Christ.

The suggestion that the prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection stems from verse 10b rather than from the entire quotation comes from four observations. First, Peter already demonstrated that it is not necessary to develop an entire quotation. In quoting Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:17–21 Peter focused on only the beginning and the ending of that Old Testament passage. He did not address the coming of the great day of the Lord (v. 20). Second, Peter focused his argument on the physical decay described only in Psalm 16:10b. The reference to David's tomb was to demonstrate that David's body had decayed (Acts 2:29). Also the change to *ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ* emphasizes the physical body of the Messiah (v. 31). Third, the shift from a personal pronoun (“my soul”) to the מְצִיחַ (“favored one”) in the psalm signaled a move away from David as the referent in Psalm 16:10b.

Fourth, Peter's argument cannot be limited merely to the hope of not being abandoned to the grave. The Old Testament clearly taught a future resurrection. Isaiah 26:19 describes the resurrection of corpses to a life of joy, and Daniel 12:2 mentions the raising of both the righteous and the wicked to receive their appropriate rewards. Peter's audience would almost certainly have believed in a future resurrection. Therefore, if the emphasis was solely on not being abandoned to the grave, David's undisturbed tomb only proved that the resurrection had not yet occurred. Peter obviously was arguing for more than merely not being abandoned to the grave. Instead he was speaking of resurrection before decay. This comes only from Psalm 16:10b, a specific prophecy of the Messiah's resurrection.

In summary Peter's introduction and commentary on Psalm 16:8–11 provide several important insights into his understanding of the passage. Peter's introduction pointed to Psalm 16:8–11 as

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<sup>67</sup> See 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.



the reason death could not hold Jesus. Jesus had to be raised because death could not hold Him, and death could not hold the Messiah because of the prophecy in Psalm 16:8–11. Peter's introduction also revealed that in Psalm 16:8–11 David spoke of Jesus the Messiah. This introduction ("David said in reference to him") shows that David was not the sole referent of the quoted passage. Peter stated that David's undisturbed tomb attested to the fact that the prophecy was not of himself. David did not fulfill the words in Psalm 16:8–11. In fact those verses were the speech of a prophet who understood in some way the messianic implications of the Davidic Covenant. David's prophetic foresight and awareness of the covenant implications allowed him to speak of the Messiah's resurrection. This resurrection is specifically prophesied in verse 10b, which declares that the body of the "favored one" will not experience decay.

Then in Acts 2:32 Peter offered eyewitness testimony as evidence that Jesus fulfilled the prediction given in Psalm 16:10b. Peter and the Eleven, and probably many others, could testify that God had raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 1:22), for they had seen Him before His body suffered decay. His resurrection shows that He is the Messiah!

#### CONCLUSION

Peter's commentary on Psalm 16:8–11 reveals important insights into his understanding of this key Old Testament passage. Verse 10b is a prophecy by David of the Messiah's resurrection. As a prophet David had foresight of the Messiah's resurrection, and as a recipient of the Davidic Covenant he had insight into its ultimate fulfillment in Messiah's rule. The phrase Peter used to introduce the quotation, "David spoke concerning Him," shows that Psalm 16:10b focused on the Messiah rather than himself. The distancing of David from the referent of the psalm becomes even clearer through Peter's words about David's tomb. The decay of David's body attested to Peter's point that David spoke not of himself but of the Messiah.

Clearly then in Acts 2:25–32 Peter quoted Psalm 16:8–11, specifically the single line in verse 10b, as a direct prophecy from David concerning the Messiah's resurrection.



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