

Psalms, Messianic Psalms, Psalm 16 (Part 2)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke provides an exegesis and exposition of Psalm 16 as a foundational Messianic psalm prophetically declaring the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Waltke examines how New Testament apostles like Peter and Paul cited Psalm 16 to affirm that the Messiah would not undergo bodily corruption, while addressing historical-critical arguments that attempt to translate the Hebrew term shachat merely as 'the pit.' Through rhetorical analysis and linguistic evidence—demonstrating from Hebrew poetic personification and verb collocations that shachat signifies 'corruption'—Waltke defends the divine inspiration and Christological validity of the text. The lecture concludes by detailing the psalm's structure of covenantal trust, bodily security in death, and eternal joy in God's presence.

Outline

I. Introduction and Methodological Foundations

A. Context within the Psalms Series

1. Methodological approach: Exegesis and exposition of distinct genres across the Psalter.
2. Prior genre studies: Historical (Psalm 4), Hymns (Psalm 100), Lament (Psalm 22), Coronation/Royal (Psalms 2 & 110).
3. Significance of Psalm 16: Crucial prophetic psalm utilized by Apostles Peter (Acts 2) and Paul (Acts 13) to explain Christ's resurrection.

B. Genre and Title Classification of Psalm 16

1. Title: Miktam of David (traditionally understood as 'inscripturation' or 'writing of David').
2. Genre possibilities: Petition Psalm (addresses God directly for safety), Song of Trust/Confidence (dominance of trust and praise), and Messianic Psalm (prophetic fulfillment in Christ).

II. The History of Interpretation and Theological Controversy

A. New Testament Apostolic Interpretation

1. Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2): Cites Psalm 16:8–11 as David speaking prophetically of the resurrection of the Messiah, whose body did not see decay.

2. Paul at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13): Contrasts David (who died, was buried, and decayed) with Jesus (whom God raised without seeing decay).

3. Theological premise: Messiah raised within three days before bodily corruption sets in.

B. The Challenge of Historical Criticism

1. Modern critical shift: Rejection of Septuagint translation of shachat ('corruption') in favor of 'the pit' (e.g., S. R. Driver, BDB Lexicon).

2. Critical claim: The psalmist merely expresses a temporary hope of surviving a crisis, not a resurrection or eternal life.

3. Impact on theology: Undermines Apostolic authority and weakens Christological preaching in modern churches.

C. Waltke's Linguistic and Exegetical Defense of Shachat as 'Corruption'

1. Homonym analysis: Distinguishing between shachat (feminine from shuach, 'pit') and shachat (masculine trilateral root, 'corruption').

2. Evidence from poetic personification: In Job 17:14, shachat is personified as 'my father' (masculine noun), proving a distinct root from the feminine 'pit'.

3. Evidence from verb collocations: Verbs associated with 'pit' are verbs of motion ('go down to'), whereas verse 10 uses ra'ah ('to see/experience'), denoting state of corruption.

4. Conclusion: Septuagint, ancient versions, and translations like ESV/NIV correctly translate shachat as 'corruption,' validating Messianic prophecy.

III. Expository Structure and Exegesis of Psalm 16

A. Introductory Petition for Safety (v. 1)

1. Prayer to El (the transcendent, all-powerful God) for preservation (shamarini).

2. Request is for safety in and through death, rooted in taking covenant refuge in God.

B. Confession of Trust Before Death (vv. 2–8)

1. Loyalty to the Covenant Community (vv. 2–4)

a. Sole allegiance to I Am (Adonai): Acknowledging no good exists apart from God (v. 2).

b. Delight in the Holy Ones (saints): High esteem for the faithful in the land (v. 3).

c. Repudiation of apostates: Refusal to participate in pagan blood libations or invoke false gods (v. 4).

2. Causes for Trust and Loyalty (vv. 5–8)

a. Inheritance from I Am: God Himself is the portion and cup; boundary lines fall in pleasant places (vv. 5–6).

b. Instruction from I Am: Praise for divine counsel instructing the conscience/kidneys at night (v. 7).

c. Protection and Presence: God at the right hand ensures the psalmist will not be moved (v. 8).

C. Commitment of the Corpse to God and Eternal Hope (vv. 9–11)

1. Joyful Confidence in Facing Death (v. 9)
 - a. Total emotional rejoicing (heart and liver/soul).
 - b. Physical body rests secure confronting the grave.
2. Preservation from Corruption and Sheol (v. 10)
 - a. God will not abandon His devoted one to the realm of the dead.
 - b. The Holy One will not experience corruption (fulfilled in resurrection).
3. Eternal Life and Fullness of Joy (v. 11)
 - a. Divine revelation of the path of life.
 - b. Fullness of joy in God's presence and eternal pleasures at His right hand.

IV. Conclusion and Pastoral Application

- A. Summary of the Central Message: The chosen King petitions God for preservation, secure in His covenant inheritance and confident of resurrection beyond the grave.
- B. Practical Application: Psalm 16 provides ultimate comfort and hope for believers facing death, assuring that fellowship with God culminates in eternal, unbroken joy.