

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 25,

Psalm 16 as a Messianic Psalm

20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome in, everybody. We're diving into something pretty interesting today. We've got this lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke, and it's all about Psalm 16 and whether or not it's like a prophecy about the Messiah.

It's a fascinating one, isn't it? Yeah, I mean, Psalm 16 has been interpreted in so many different ways over the centuries, almost like it has these different layers of meaning all kind of woven together. Yeah, and he points out that it's this Miktam, but nobody's really sure what that means. Some scholars think it might be like a permanent inscription, but it's kind of still a mystery.

But we do know all six of the psalms that are categorized as miktams are petition psalms. So, like, the writer is pleading with God. That's right.

And this one's a petition for safety in death, which is kind of an unusual thing to see, but it's not just a plea. It's also a song of trust and praise. I mean, the psalmist is clearly confident in God.

And then, of course, there's the whole layer that we're going to be focusing on today, the possibility that it's a messianic psalm pointing towards Christ and his resurrection. Yeah. And that's where things get really interesting.

I mean, you have Peter and Paul. They're both using Psalm 16 to explain Jesus's resurrection in the New Testament. And they point to that verse: you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

Right. It seems pretty straightforward. Yeah.

He even mentions that story about a Presbyterian preacher who was so thrown off by the word pit in the New Revised Standard Version that she just skipped the whole verse in her sermon. Oh, that's a great example. I mean, you know how scholarly debates can actually have an impact on how people engage with the Bible in their everyday lives.

Yeah. So where does Dr. Waltke land in all of this? Yeah. It sounds like he's jumping into the middle of a pretty heated debate.

He certainly is. Dr. Waltke basically challenges a lot of these modern scholars. He's arguing that the traditional understanding of Shohat as corruption is the right one.

Okay. But how does he make that case? I mean, is he just relying on faith, or is there something more to his argument? Well, Dr. Waltke, he's all about digging deep into the text itself. You know, he really stresses the importance of looking at the context of the psalm, the structure, the language used, all the imagery, all of it.

Yeah. To really understand the meaning of Shohat. He wants to go beyond just looking at the dictionary definition.

So it's like understanding a word. Yes. Within a sentence, you have to consider how it relates to everything around it.

Exactly. And his method is really thorough. He looks at every instance of a word in the entire Hebrew Bible to understand its full range of meanings.

It's a commitment. Yeah. He wants to see the complete picture, not just find examples that support his argument.

Wow. So what does all this research tell us about Shohat then? Well, this is where it gets really interesting. He explains that there are two possible meanings for the word.

Think of it like those words in English that have multiple meanings. You know, like bank. It could be, you know, the side of a river, or it could be a place where you keep your money.

Yeah. Yeah. So with Shohat, one possibility is that it comes from the word shwach, which means to descend.

So in that case, Shohat would literally mean, you know, a pit, like a physical hole in the ground. But the second possibility is that Shohat has its own root. And in that case, it's a masculine noun that could mean corruption or decay.

OK, so two very different possibilities with pretty big implications for how we understand the verse. Exactly. So how does he decide which one is the right meaning? Well, he finds a passage in Job 17.14 where Shohat is actually personified as a father.

And this, he argues, proves that it can be a masculine noun, which supports the corruption interpretation. So he's using the Bible itself to unpack the meaning of this word. Yes.

And he doesn't stop there. He also analyzes the verbs that are associated with Shohat in Psalm 16. OK.

And he points out that they indicate a state of being rather than movement. Like, for example, the verse says, "You will not let your holy one see decay. And this, he argues, you know, fits better with the corruption meaning because it's describing an experience rather than a physical location.

It's like he's building a case. Exactly. He's, piece by piece, using the language itself as evidence.

Precisely. And his conclusion is pretty bold. He says that the Septuagint, the NIV, and the ESV got it right, but that other translations and even some, you know, really well-respected lexicons got it wrong.

He's not afraid to challenge some big names in biblical scholarship. That's kind of like a detective story. It is.

With Dr. Walt Reig as the detective. And his findings, you know, they have some major theological implications because if Shohat really means corruption, then, you know, Psalm 16, it really could be a prophecy about Christ's resurrection. And that strengthens the connection between the Old and New Testaments.

Wow. So much writing on this one word. But even beyond this whole debate about Sheol, what else does Psalm 16 teach us? Like, what's at the heart of it all? Well, you know, regardless of how you interpret that specific word in Psalm 16, it's a really powerful statement about the psalmist's trust in God.

Yeah. It's just full of these declarations of dependence and unwavering faith, even in the face of death. What to you are some of the most striking declarations of trust that he makes? There are so many.

I mean, he says that God is his sole source of good. Yeah. Which is such a powerful statement, you know, of complete reliance.

He finds joy in the community of those who are faithful to God, what we often call, you know, the covenant community. Right. He even refuses to worship with those who have turned away from God.

Wow. And perhaps most beautifully, he declares that God is his inheritance, his guide, his constant companion. It's such a beautiful picture of, like, radical trust, you know, knowing that no matter what happens, God is there, God is good, and God is enough.

It is. And what's really remarkable is the psalmist's emotional state through all of this. Yeah.

You know, he's not afraid; he's not in despair. Yeah. Instead, he expresses this deep joy and this sense of security, even when he's facing death.

And it reminds us that true faith, you know, it doesn't just offer comfort in the afterlife. Right. It can bring peace and joy right now, you know, in the midst of life's challenges.

Absolutely. That's such a powerful message for anyone going through tough times. But what about life after death? I mean, how does the psalmist approach that? Well, that's where this concept of God's presence after death comes in.

Right. You know, the psalmist, he doesn't imagine death as just the end of existence. Yeah.

He anticipates that there's going to be an ongoing relationship with God beyond the grave. Okay. He believes that the connection he has with God in this life will continue into the next.

So it's not about ceasing to exist, but about transitioning into, like, a different kind of relationship with God. That's a good way to put it. Dr. Waltke actually uses this analogy of a child learning to play music.

Okay. You know how a child will practice diligently, even though it can be, you know, kind of tedious and frustrating at times? But the reward is being able to play beautiful music in the future. Right.

Well, in the same way, the psalmist believes that the faithfulness and devotion that he practices in this life... Yeah. ...they're going to be rewarded with the joy of experiencing God's presence in the next. That's an interesting analogy.

But wouldn't you say that even the process of, like, learning music can be joyful in itself? Oh, absolutely. Like, doesn't the psalm also speak to the joy of experiencing God's presence in this life, not just in the next? You're absolutely right. You know, the psalm isn't just about future rewards.

Yeah. It's about finding joy and fulfillment in our relationship with God right now. So it's not just about the quantity of life, but the quality.

Yes. Like, eternal life isn't just about living forever. It's about experiencing, like, the fullness of life, the joy of God's presence both now and in the future.

Exactly. And that, I think, is one of the key takeaways from Psalm 16. It encourages us to live a life of deep trust in God.

Yeah. Knowing that our faithfulness will be met with joy and fulfillment both in this life and in the life to come really challenges us to consider what it truly means to have faith, doesn't it? It does. It's like it's calling us to go beyond just believing in God.

Right. To actually believe in God, like trusting his promises. Yeah.

Especially when things are difficult. Yeah. And that trust, you know, should actually impact our lives, our decisions, the way we deal with fear.

Right. Everything, you know? Do you think the psalmist might have been writing this during, like, a personal crisis? Because, you know, Dr. Waltke mentions that he seems to be in some sort of danger. Yeah.

It's definitely possible. I mean, the fact that he's asking for God's protection definitely implies that he's feeling threatened, you know? Vulnerable. And the way he just clings to God, you know, affirming his total dependence, it suggests a deep need for reassurance.

Yeah. You know, that makes me think about times in my own life when I've felt most vulnerable and in need of God's presence. It's like in those moments that faith becomes less about what you know in your head.

Yes. And more about, like, a lifeline. It is.

A source of strength and hope. Absolutely. You know? I think that's a great point, and it really highlights how relatable the psalmist's experience is.

I mean, you know, even though he lived centuries ago. Right. His words still resonate with us today because they tap into that basic human need for security, meaning, and connection to something bigger than ourselves.

Yeah. And the way he finds that connection is so powerful. Like, he doesn't just turn to God as a last resort.

Right. God is at the very center of his life. Yes.

God is his joy, his inheritance. Yeah. His guide.

It's like a complete reordering of his priorities. Exactly. And it's a shift that, you know, we can make in our own lives, too.

Yeah. You know, we can choose to make God the focal point. Right.

You know, to find our security in him. Yeah. And to let his love and presence, you know, shape everything we do and say.

It's beautiful, but it's also really challenging, isn't it? Oh, it is. To let go of our own limited perspectives. Yeah.

And embrace a worldview where God is at the center. It is. It requires, you know, a change in how we think.

Yeah. It requires a willingness to let go of control and trust in God's wisdom. But the psalmist assures us that this surrender.

Right. It doesn't restrict us. It actually leads to true freedom.

Mm-hmm. A life that's filled with joy, security, and deep meaning. Yeah.

Speaking of surrender, one thing that really struck me about Psalm 16 is how the psalmist entrusts not just his life, but like his very body to God. Mm-hmm. It's like he's saying, I'm completely yours, God.

Even in death, you hold me safe. That is a powerful declaration of faith, isn't it? He's not afraid of death because he knows that even then he's not separated from God's love and care. It actually reminds me of Romans 8.3839, where Paul writes, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Wow. That's an amazing passage. Yeah.

It's like the ultimate affirmation- it is... of security, knowing that nothing can break the bond that we have with God through Christ. But I'm curious.

How does this idea of bodily resurrection, how does that fit into the psalmist's understanding? Did he have a clear idea of what that would look like? Well, that's a question that scholars have debated for centuries. You know, some believe that the Old Testament doesn't have this fully developed concept of bodily resurrection. They argue that the focus is more on, like, the soul or the spirit continuing in some form of afterlife.

Right. So it's more about, like, an ongoing relationship with God- yes... than a physical return to life.

That's one interpretation. Okay. But others, like Dr. Waltke, see these hints of bodily resurrection in the Old Testament, even if it's not explicitly stated.

And they would point to Psalm 16- precisely... as evidence of that. Yes.

That verse, you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Yeah. That's seen as foreshadowing Christ's resurrection.

Like a glimpse- yes... into a future reality. Exactly.

A promise that death isn't the end. Right. And that even our bodies will be redeemed.

It's such a profound message of hope, and it really speaks to the completeness of God's salvation. Yeah. He doesn't just redeem our souls.

He redeems our whole being, body and soul. That makes me think about Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 when he describes the resurrection body. Right.

He says it's sown in weakness, but raised in power, sown in dishonor, but raised in glory. It's like a complete transformation- yes. ... renewal- it is.

... of our physical existence. Absolutely. It reminds us that our bodies, they're not just these temporary vessels.

Right. They're a fundamental part of who we are. Yeah.

They matter to God, and they will be part of our eternal experience. Yeah. That's a comforting thought, especially as we get older and we see our bodies start to decline.

Right. It gives us hope that even in our physical decline, there's a promise of restoration. It does.

It reminds us that our ultimate hope isn't in this earthly life- right... but in the life to come. Yeah.

A life that's free from death, sorrow, and pain. Man, I can only imagine the awe and the joy that the disciples must have felt when they saw the resurrected Jesus- oh, yeah... physically alive- yeah.

... still bearing the marks of his suffering- Right. ... yet radiating glory. It must have been an incredible experience.

It confirms that God's promises are true. Even the impossible is possible with him. I think what's important to remember is that the resurrection isn't just an event in the past.

Right. It's a living hope that shapes our present and our future. What do you mean by that? Well, if we truly believe in the resurrection- yeah.

... if we believe that death has been conquered- right. ... it changes our whole perspective. It gives us the courage to face our fears- ... to live boldly, to love deeply, to serve sacrificially, knowing that our lives have eternal significance.

Mm-hmm. It takes away the fear of death and fills us with this hope that goes beyond our circumstances. It's like looking at the world- yes.

... through the lens of eternity- exactly. ... knowing that our current struggles are temporary- yeah. ... but the joy that awaits us is everlasting.

Exactly. That, I think, is the core message of Psalm 16, a message of complete trust in a God who keeps his promises, a God who holds us safe even in death, a God who offers us a life that continues beyond the grave, a life that's overflowing with joy and everlasting heavenly hope.

What an incredible message of hope and encouragement. But before we wrap up, I'd like to go back to something you mentioned earlier- yeah... about the importance of community.

Mm-hmm. The psalmist seems to find great joy in being with other believers. That's right.

He mentions his delight in the saints in the land, and I think that's such a vital aspect of living out this kind of faith that we see in Psalm 16. Right. It's not just a solitary journey.

Right. We're meant to live it out together, encouraging and supporting one another. It makes me think about that verse in Hebrews 10.25, "... let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another in all the more as you see the day approaching." That's a powerful reminder, isn't it? Yeah.

We need each other. We need the support, the encouragement, the accountability that comes from being part of a community of faith. We weren't designed to go it alone.

There's something truly special about gathering with other believers- yeah... who share your faith, your hope- yeah... and your love for God.

It is. It's a place where you can be honest and vulnerable- yes... where you can share your struggles and your joys- absolutely.

... and where you can grow together in your understanding of God and his purpose for your life. With a spiritual family, you know? Yeah. It's a place where you belong, where you're accepted and loved for who you are- Yeah.

... and I think that feeling of belonging is essential- Yeah. ... for developing that kind of deep trust in God that we see in Psalm 16. Hmm.

Because knowing that you're loved and supported by others- Mm-hmm. ... makes it easier to trust in God's love and support as well. Precisely.

You know, it's a reflection of God's love. Right. A tangible expression of his grace.

Yeah. And that's such a beautiful- yeah... and essential part of living out the message of Psalm 16.

You know, so much of what we've been discussing circles back to this idea of trust and confidence in God. Right. You know, the psalmist seems to find immense strength and security- yeah.

... in his relationship with God. Absolutely. You know, Psalm 16, it's not just a collection of abstract theological ideas.

Right. It's this raw and honest expression of a human heart finding solace and refuge in God. Mm-hmm.

And it reminds us that this same refuge is available to us- ... no matter what we're facing, you know? Yeah. It's amazing how Psalm 16 packs so much into just 11 verses. Right.

Trust, hope, community, eternal life. Mm-hmm. It's all there.

Yeah. It's like a guidebook for navigating life's ups and downs... and finding peace and joy in the middle of it all. It really is.

You know, the psalms are so powerful in their ability to express, you know, the deepest desires of the human heart. Yeah. And Psalm 16 is a great example of that.

Yeah. It makes you wonder what else we miss when we just kind of skim the surface of these ancient texts. Yeah.

There's so much wisdom and insight waiting to be discovered. If we just slow down and dig a little deeper- I totally agree. And that's what makes these deep dives so exciting.

Yeah. You know, it's a chance to really, you know, take a close look, to ask questions, to challenge our assumptions- right... and to discover, you know, new layers of meaning that we might have missed otherwise.

It's like peeling back the layers of an onion. Yeah. Yeah.

You find more and more complexity the deeper you go. And in the case of Psalm 16, you know, what we find at the center is this incredible message of hope. Mm-hmm.

A message that has spoken to people throughout history and continues to speak to us today. It is. It is.

And it's a message that challenges us to live differently, to put God at the center of our lives, to trust in His promises, even when we don't fully understand them. It's a call to, like, radical faith, isn't it? It is. A faith that isn't afraid to ask the hard questions, a faith that finds joy even in the midst of suffering, a faith that embraces the promise of a life beyond the grave, a life where we'll finally see God face-to-face.

Absolutely. It's a faith that's worth pursuing, you know, a faith that has the power to transform our lives and give us a hope that can anchor us through anything. So, as we wrap up our deep dive into Psalm 16, what's like the one key takeaway you'd want our listener to remember? I think the most important thing to remember is this.

No matter what challenges you're facing, no matter how dark or uncertain things may seem, God is with you. He's holding you safe. He's guiding your steps, and He has a plan for your life that goes far beyond the limits of this world.

That's a beautiful reminder and a perfect note to end on. We hope this deep dive has been insightful for you and maybe sparked a desire to explore the Psalms for yourself and uncover the treasures of wisdom and hope that they contain. I hope so, too.

And as you delve into these ancient texts, just remember to approach them with an open mind and heart, asking God to reveal their meaning and to show you His truth. Thanks for joining us on this journey through Psalm 16. Keep exploring, keep asking questions, and keep diving deep.