

# **Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Messianic Psalms, Psalm 16, Part 2, Session 25, 6-min. Video Overview**

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All right, let's jump right in. Today, we're going to unravel an ancient mystery, a real detective story that's been locked inside a single Hebrew word for thousands of years, and believe me, the stakes are enormous. We're talking about implications that could shake a foundational belief of Christianity right to its core.

And that really is the central question we're tackling. Is it possible that just one word translated a certain way for centuries could actually be a massive mistake? And if it is, what happens to the entire belief system that was built on top of it? Let's find out. So to get why this one little word is such a huge deal, we've got to go all the way back to the very beginning of the Christian church, right at the start.

In the first century, the apostles zeroed in on a specific passage, Psalm 16, and they used it as their cornerstone proof for the resurrection of Jesus. This right here, this is the exact verse the apostle Peter quotes in his very first sermon on the day of Pentecost. And this wasn't some minor side note.

This was his headline argument. This was the proof he used to try and convince thousands of his fellow Jews that the Messiah had in fact risen from the dead. The logic they used was actually incredibly simple, but also incredibly powerful.

Peter and later the apostle Paul basically said, look, King David couldn't have been talking about himself here. Why? Well, because we all know David died. We know where he was buried and his body, like any other, saw decay.

So they argued this prophecy must've been for someone else, a future descendant, the Messiah, whose body would uniquely not see decay. So you've got to understand this interpretation wasn't just a nice theological idea. For the early church, it was a primary tool for evangelism.

It was the prophetic proof that explained the seemingly impossible: how the Messiah could die, but still conquer death. The whole apostolic argument really hinged on this reading of the Psalm. But this, this is where our mystery really begins.

That whole prophecy, the entire argument hangs by a thread on the meaning of one specific Hebrew word. And as it turns out, that word might just have two very, very different meanings. And this is the challenge that biblical scholars started raising centuries later.

What if the Greek translation of the old Testament that the apostles were using, which is called the Septuagint, actually got it wrong? What if the original Hebrew meant something else entirely? It all boils down to one Hebrew word, *shahat*. If it means corruption or decay, well, then the apostles' argument is rock solid. But if it means the pit, as in the grave, the meaning changes completely.

It stops being a prophecy about resurrection and turns into David, just hoping God will save him from a dangerous spot for now- two totally different ideas. And this quote from the hugely influential scholar S.R. Driver really puts the problem into sharp focus. From his point of view, the conclusion was unavoidable.

If shahat means the pit, then the apostles' core argument was based on a mistranslation, and it, well, it just falls apart. Now this wasn't just some dusty academic debate. This interpretation started to trickle down.

It made its way into standard Hebrew lexicons. Think of them as the dictionaries of their day. And even into some modern Bible translations.

So all of a sudden you had seminary students, pastors, and just everyday readers getting really confused, seeing what looked like a major contradiction between the Old and New Testaments. So how in the world do we solve this? Well, we're going to put on our detective hats and follow the linguistic trail blazed by the scholar Bruce Waltke as he cracks the case of the word shahat. Okay.

The first clue we need to understand is that we might be dealing with something called a homonym. It sounds complicated, but it's not. It's just like the word bat in English.

It can mean the flying animal, or it can mean the thing you hit a baseball with. It's possible shahat is actually two different words that just happen to look and sound exactly the same. One means pit, the other means corruption.

So here's our game plan for this investigation. Step one, we need to figure out if there really are two different root words, one masculine and one feminine. Step two, we've got to hunt for a clue somewhere else in Hebrew poetry that tells us which one is being used.

And finally, step three, we'll check if the verb in Psalm 16, the verb to see, fits better with one meaning over the other. And here it is, the secret key to the entire puzzle, a specific rule in Hebrew poetry. When you personify an object- you know, talk about it like it's a person- you have to stick to its grammatical gender.

For example, a noun that's grammatically feminine, you have to treat it like a she. You simply can't call a feminine noun father. This is our crucial piece of forensic evidence.

So let's think about this. If the word for pit is feminine and the word for corruption is masculine, all we need is one place in ancient literature where shakat is clearly treated as one or the other. And this, this is the smoking gun.

In the book of Job, the speaker looks at shakat and says, "You are my father. By calling it father, a masculine term, the poet proves that there is a masculine version of the word shakat and that masculine root means corruption. So let's lay out the final evidence.

Case closed: Job personifies shakat as masculine, which proves it can't be the feminine word for pit. We know the masculine word means corruption. And on top of that, think about the verb in Psalm 16: to see; you don't really see a pit in this context.

You go down into it, but you absolutely do see or experience a state of being like corruption. The verdict is in; the linguistic evidence is clear. The apostles got it right.

So now that we've solved the linguistic puzzle, we can finally read the Psalm with the same confidence the apostles did. And when we do that, we unlock its full, powerful message, which it turns out is about a lot more than just prophecy. You know, this Psalm is honestly one of the most profound statements of faith you'll find anywhere in the Old Testament.

It's this raw, confident declaration of trust from someone who is staring death right in the face. And it offers this incredible message of hope for all of us. I mean, just look at the heart of this trust.

David says God is his only source of anything good. He says his real inheritance isn't a kingdom or a bunch of possessions. It's his relationship with God himself.

And because of that, he is so confident that he believes his physical body can actually rest securely, even as it's facing the grave, and to really help us grasp this hope, there's this incredible modern analogy: after his wife's funeral, a theologian named Donald Barnhouse was driving with his children when a huge truck passed by and cast a dark shadow over their car. He turned to his kids and said this. And that's the message of Psalm 16 in a nutshell: for the person of faith, death is like the shadow of that truck.

It's real. It's dark. You absolutely experience it, but you don't get hit by the truck itself.

You don't get hit by the finality, the eternal separation, the ultimate destruction; the body rests secure because it's awaiting something more. It's pretty amazing when you think about it, this whole journey, from an apostle's first sermon to a modern scholarly debate, all of it hinged on the grammatical gender of a single Hebrew noun. It's a powerful reminder of just how much of our history and even our deepest beliefs can rest on the careful, often invisible work of a translator, just trying to get it right.