

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION
OF PSALM 15 (=16 MT) ON ITS EARLY
CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

by

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A RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to Professor Robert W. Yarbrough
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
NT 8722 Septuagint and the New Testament
toward the degree of
Ph.D. in Theological Studies – New Testament
at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Deerfield, IL
December 2008

Introduction

Psalm 16 is of paramount importance to Christian theology, as is evidenced by the quotation of it at the beginning of Peter's ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 2:25-28) and at the beginning of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 13:35). But there are a fair number of scholars who believe that the interpretation given in Acts could not have come from the MT of Psalm 16. Their contention is that Luke used Psalm 15 LXX, which was a "mistranslation"¹ of the Hebrew text, and that the Hebrew text "will not support the argument which the Apostles built on it."² Therefore this paper will assess the LXX translation of this psalm to determine the amount of influence this translation may have had on the psalm's early Christian interpretation. In order to accomplish this we will: 1) briefly seek to understand the early Christian interpretation of the psalm, 2) assess whether the LXX translator embedded his eschatology in the psalm or attempted a conservative rendering, 3) determine whether the LXX rendering of תַּחַשׁ by διαφθορά opens up to the text a meaning not possible in the MT, 4) investigate the wording of Psalm 16 MT to see if it merely echoes other songs of (temporal) deliverance,

¹ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, tans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn, rev. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 182 n 1. Similarly, David P. Moessner says, "Psalm 15 LXX diverges greatly from its counterpart in the Hebrew text, Psalm 16, which is a psalm of trust" ("*Two Lords 'at the Right Hand'?* The Psalms and an Intertextual Reading of Peter's Pentecost Speech [Acts 2:14-36]," pages 215-232 in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Philips [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998], esp. p. 223).

² S. R. Driver, "The Method of Studying the Psalter: Psalm XVI," *Expositor* 11 (1910): 20-41, esp. p. 37.

and 5) exegete Psalm 16 to determine its original meaning. After this our conclusion will be presented.

The Early Christian Interpretation of Psalm 16

There is much debate over how Peter interprets Psalm 16 in Acts 2, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with this issue in detail,³ but a brief overview of scholarly opinions will help us determine the central issues to look for in the MT. A number of scholars believe Peter thought that the words he quoted from Psalm 16 were words that the preincarnate Christ was speaking about his own resurrection by the mouth of David.⁴ According to this view the verses have no other referent than Christ himself. A second view is that of Gregory Trull, who argues that Peter believed David to be speaking of himself through most of the psalm but switching the referent to the messiah when he refers to God's קֹדֶשׁ (ESV: "holy one"). According to Trull, only Jesus could fulfill verse 10b, because only he was resurrected before decaying. The rest of the psalm was fulfilled directly by David and typologically by Jesus.⁵ A third view is held by Walter Kaiser, who believes that the entire psalm refers to the קֹדֶשׁ, which according to Kaiser is "the recipient and conveyor of God's ancient but ever-renewed promise" – at first David, but ultimately Jesus. Kaiser also contends that this psalm is speaking of the eternal life to be experienced by God's קֹדֶשׁ and that Peter interprets the psalm according

³ For a more detailed breakdown of positions on this question, see Gregory V. Trull, "Views on Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32," *BSac* 161 (2004): 194-214.

⁴ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 85; Charles Hadden Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Updated Edition in Today's Language*, updated by Roy H. Clarke (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 90; Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (JSNTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 137.

⁵ Gregory V. Trull, "Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32," *BSac* 161 (2004): 432-448.

to its original sense.⁶ A fourth view is that Peter argued that because Jesus was “a part of” David, the first person references were fulfilled in Jesus at his resurrection.⁷ And a final view is that Peter believed the psalmist to be expressing confidence that death could not end his communion with God and that this psalm was then unfulfilled until the resurrection of Christ, at which point the door was opened for this psalm to be fulfilled not only in Christ, but also in those who are in him.⁸ As can be seen, each of these scholars differs in regard to how Peter saw the psalm applying to the messiah, but all are in agreement that Peter believed that the psalm spoke of eternal life in some sense.

On the contrary, many OT scholars argue along with Hans-Joachim Kraus that the psalm in its original context “does not deal with resurrection, or even immortality, but with the rescue from an acute mortal danger.”⁹ Kraus argues that this is the original meaning because the language of this psalm is no different from other psalms where the psalmist asks for “protection and sheltering against the danger of death.”¹⁰ The difference between the original meaning of Psalm 16 and the meaning given to it in the New Testament, then, stems mainly from the LXX translator’s decision to render $\pi\tau\psi$ (“pit” according to BDB p. 101) with the word $\delta\iota\alpha\phi\theta\omicron\rho\acute{\alpha}$ (“corruption”) in verse 10 and $\pi\tau\tau\eta\lambda\grave{\iota}$ (“securely”) with $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\pi\acute{\iota}\delta\iota$ (“in hope”) in verse 9. In regard to the first rendering,

⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Promise to David in Psalm 16 and Its Application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37,” *JETS* 23 (1980): 219-229.

⁷ John J. Kilgallen, “‘With Many Other Words’ (Acts 2,40): Theological Assumptions in Peter’s Pentecost Speech,” *Biblica* 83 (2002): 71-87, esp. p. 77.

⁸ Pierre G. Constant, “Les Citations du Psaume 16 dans les Actes des Apôtres” (MA Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1989); Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 158-159; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 230-231.

⁹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

the MT is understood to mean that the psalmist would not go to the grave, whereas the LXX translation means that the psalmist's body will not decay. Most scholars, understanding the reference being to not dying, assume that the psalmist is merely referring to an immediate threat to his life and is not expecting to live forever.¹¹ In regard to the second rendering, in the MT the psalmist seems to be saying his flesh (currently) dwells securely, whereas in the LXX he seems to be saying his flesh dwells (in the grave) in hope. These observations have led Ernst Haenchen to conclude that the early Christian interpretation of Psalm 16 could "only have arisen in Hellenistic Christianity."¹²

*Did the Translator Embed His Eschatology
or Attempt a Conservative Rendering?*

Joachim Schaper notes these two "changes" as an example of the translators of Psalms embedding their eschatology in the Greek Psalter.¹³ Schaper's thesis – that this happens throughout the Psalter – has been seriously challenged by a number of scholars who argue that "the OG is a conservative rendering of the Hebrew, as we might expect for a liturgical text."¹⁴ In Psalm 15 [16], we see this objection confirmed in two ways.

¹¹ A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 1-72* (The New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 146; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, (WBC 19; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 158. Mitchell Dahood, however, says, "The psalmist firmly believes that he will be granted the same privilege accorded Enoch and Elijah; he is convinced that God will assume him to himself, without suffering the pains of death. This sentiment is also expressed in Pss xlix 16 and lxxiii 24" (*Psalms 1: 1-50* [AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1965], 91).

¹² Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 182.

¹³ Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (WUNT 2/76; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 49.

¹⁴ Claude E. Cox, "Schaper's *Eschatology* Meets Kraus's *Theology of the Psalms*," pages 289-311 in *The Old Greek Psalter: Studies in Honour of Albert Pietersma*, ed. Robert J. V. Heibert, Claude E. Cox, and Peter J. Gentry (JSOTSup 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 310. See also Albert Pietersma, review of Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter*, *BO* 54 (1997): 185-190.

The first thing one notices when comparing Psalm 16 MT and Psalm 15 LXX is an attempt toward a wooden translation, as is often evident in the Old Greek Psalter. In verse 1 and verses 5-11 the translation is word-for-word, with each word choice being highly predictable. In verses 2-4 this is not the case, but these verses are notoriously difficult to translate – so much so that many modern scholars consider the MT to be corrupt and have proposed various emendations (many in line with the LXX).¹⁵ But even if the MT represents the *Vorlage* of the LXX it can be seen that where the LXX does stray from a wooden translation it does *not* do so in a way that opens up an eschatological reading. This is the first reason to support Cox’s proposal that the Old Greek text is “a conservative rendering of the Hebrew,” rather than Schaper’s proposal that the translators embed their eschatology in the text.

Furthermore, what Schaper fails to note is that in the two cases where he questions the translator’s word choice, the translator is merely being consistent.¹⁶ Of the nine times חָשַׁב occurs in Psalms, five times it is translated with διαφθορά (9:16; 16:10; 30:10; 35:7; 55:24), once with φθορά (103:4), and once with καταφθορά (49:10), all communicating the idea of “corruption.” Only twice is it translated with a word that conveys the idea of “pit” – βόθρος (7:16; 94:13). The same can be said of פָּצַח . All three occurrences of the word in Psalms are rendered by ἐλπίζω . In fact, John Oswalt observes that the verb פָּצַח is typically translated in the LXX by ἐλπίζω when it refers to relying on God and by πείθω when it speaks of “relying on what turns out to be deceptive.”¹⁷ The same holds true of the noun form, where thirteen of the thirty-six times it is rendered by

¹⁵ For example, Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 233-237.

¹⁶ So Pietersma, review of Joachim Schaper, 187-188.

¹⁷ John N. Oswalt, “ פָּצַח ,” *TWOT* 1:101-102.

ἐλπίς and fourteen times it is rendered by some form of the word πείθω.¹⁸ So there was no effort to eschatologize Psalm 16 in rendering these two words as the translator did. Instead we find Cox’s thesis supported, that the translator sought a “conservative rendering of the Hebrew.”

*Did the LXX Word Choices Open Up
a Meaning Not Possible in the MT?*

It is one thing to demonstrate that the translator attempted to give a conservative rendering and another to demonstrate that he succeeded in doing this. To work toward the latter we must ask if a new meaning got imported into the text whether the translator was conscious of this or not. This is the claim made by Haenchen and Driver and many others. Therefore we must investigate תָּשׁוּ more closely to see if the idea of “corruption” is even a possible meaning for the word, for if the psalmist is merely saying he will not see the grave, Jesus does not fulfill this psalm, and the early Christian interpretation could not come from the MT.

There are two possible roots for תָּשׁוּ: תָּשׁוּת and תָּשׁוּ. The verbal forms of these roots mean “to become corrupt” and “to sink down,” respectively. In fifteen of the twenty-three occurrences of the noun the referent is clearly a grave,¹⁹ and in many of the other cases grave imagery may be intended.²⁰ Therefore it is difficult to know whether

¹⁸ It is also rendered by εἰρήνη six times (five in Ezekiel) and ἀσφαλῆς three times (all in the Pentateuch).

¹⁹ Job 17:14; 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30; Pss 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24; 94:13; 103:4; Isa 38:17; 51:14; and Ezek 28:8. The other occurrences are Job 9:31; Pss 7:16; 9:16; 35:7; Prov 26:27; Ezek 19:4, 8; and Jonah 2:7.

²⁰ Clearly this is the case in Jonah 2:7, where Jonah’s experience is described with “Sheol” imagery (note the reference to Sheol in 2:3 and the idea of being “barred up forever” in 2:7). It also is likely to be the case in places where the psalmist speaks of enemies digging a pit for him and then falling into it (Pss 7:16; 9:16; 35:7; and Prov 26:27). One may even be able to make the case that death imagery is being used in the other examples (Job 9:31; Ezek 19:4, 8), but clearly in these instances literal

the sense of “pit” or “corruption” (or both) is intended, since both concepts are closely associated with death and Sheol. A study of the verbs that accompany this word, however, is very telling. Four times שָׁחַת is the object of the verb יָרַד (“descend [in/to],” Job 33:24; Pss 30:10; 55:24; and Ezek 28:8); once נָפַל (“fall [into],” Ps 7:16); once טָבַע (“sink [in],” Ps 9:16); once עָלָה (“come up [from],” Jonah 2:7); twice כָּרַח (“dig,” Ps 94:13; Prov 26:27); and once טָבַל (“plunge [in],” Job 9:31). This seems like a strong warrant for understanding שָׁחַת to be based on the root שׁוּח and to mean “pit.”

But there are some problems with this conclusion. First, this word was regularly rendered in other languages with words that connote “corruption.” We have already seen this with the Septuagint. It is also true of the Targums, in which שָׁחַת is rendered by the Aramaic חבּלא (“corruption”) three out of six times.²¹ This is also true in the Vulgate, Symmachus, and Theodotion.²² To conclude with the modern lexicographers that שָׁחַת is based on the root שׁוּח is to argue based on twenty-three occurrences of the word, most of which are ambiguous (i.e., “pit” or “corruption” would work in that context), that people who translated the Hebrew when it was still a living language misunderstood the word whereas we have a better understanding of it.

Second, this meaning is attested in later Hebrew. So the Qumran community identified people as “men of corruption” or “sons of corruption,” using this word (1QS 9,16; 9,22; 10,19; CD 6,15; 13,14).²³ Elsewhere they speak of לְשַׁחַת עֲלָמִים

death is not intended as life afterward is spoken of.

²¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* (JSNTSup 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 350 n 73.

²² See Bruce K. Waltke, “Psalms: Theology of,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1100-1115, esp. p. 1113, for a list of verses where each translation rendered the word with a word meaning “corruption.”

²³ See Roland Murphy, “Saḥat in Qumran Literature,” *Biblica* 39 (1958): 61-66, esp. p. 61. Murphy notes that the word is used parallel with עוֹלָה (“injustice”) in two of these cases.

(“eternal corruption,” 1QS 4,11-14), and the idea is clearly “corruption” rather than “pit.”²⁴ Rabbis also understood this word to mean “corruption,” and so arose the tradition that David’s body did not decay in the grave (Midr. Ps. 16:10). So once again modern scholars, on the basis of a few occurrences of a word, are debating its meaning with people who regularly spoke the language.

Third, as Bruce Waltke has observed, if *שְׁחַת* comes from the root *שׁוּח*, it would be a feminine noun (hence the addition of *ת* and the dropping of *ו*). In Job 17:14, however, Job says, “If I say to *שְׁחַת*, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister.’” Because grammatical gender has been shown to guide personification in Hebrew poetry, *שְׁחַת* in this case must *not* come from *שׁוּח*, but *שׁחַח*. Waltke therefore suggests that the word is *a homonym coming from both roots*.²⁵ In this way the word would often have both connotations, but if one is demanded over the other it would need to be revealed by context.

Finally, Waltke demonstrates that in Psalm 16 the meaning of “corruption” is clearly intended, because it is the object of *רָאָה* (“to see,” “to experience”). According to Waltke, this verb

takes for its object a nom. indicative of *state* of the soul or of the body: e.g., to see death (Ps 88:48[49]), to see trouble/evil (90:15; Jer 44:17), to see sorrow (Jer 20:18), to see famine (5:12), to see affliction (Lam 3:1). On the contrary, when indicating the idea of *place* (e.g., pit, grave, Sheol, gates of death, etc.), the Hebrew authors use a vb. of motion; e.g., to come (Job 5:26), to go (Isa 38:10; Eccl 9:10), to draw near (Ps 88:3[4]; 107:18), to descend (Job 21:13), to fall (Ps 7:15[16]; 57:7). The expression ‘to go down to the pit’ occurs 4x in the Psalter; 9x in Ezek; cf. Prov 1:12; Isa 38:18. In this case, the ancient versions, not

²⁴ Ibid., 65.

²⁵ Waltke, *NIDOTTE* 4:1113.

modern lexicographers, have the better of the argument, and so does the NT.²⁶

Therefore we must conclude that “corruption” is not only a *possible* meaning for תַּחַת, but that it is the *intended* meaning of תַּחַת here.

*Was the Christian Interpretation Really
the Meaning Intended by the Psalmist?*

It is not merely the rendering of תַּחַת and that has led scholars to suggest the Christian interpretation could not have come from the Hebrew text. Kraus argues that the psalm reflects the style and language of other deliverance psalms where the psalmist is merely praying to be delivered from “an acute mortal danger” and that there is no warrant for seeing anything more than that in the psalm. He also sees verses 7 and 11 as indicating that the psalmist “has received an answer[;] the ‘way of life’ has been shown to him.”²⁷ In regard to this last point, the fact that the psalmist “has received an answer” does not help us determine whether the “answer” is the knowledge that he will be delivered from this threat or that he will live forever. More of the context must be examined to determine that. This ties in with the first point, that the style and language reflects other psalms of deliverance. Which ones? And what indication is there that these are not referring to eternal life as well?

The only other place in the Hebrew Bible that speaks of not seeing the pit is Psalm 49:7-9, “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit [וַיִּהְיֶה עוֹד לְנֶצַח לֹא יִרְאֶה הַשְּׁחַת]” (ESV). Here the idea of not seeing שְׁחַת

²⁶ Waltke, *NIDOTTE* 4:1113.

²⁷ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 237.

means living *forever* (לְנֶצְחָה). This same word occurs in Psalm 16:11, where the psalmist says, “You will make known to me the path of life, fullness of joy with your presence, pleasures in your right hand forever [נֶצְחָה].” In Psalm 49 the idea is that everyone must die and see שְׁחָת because no one can afford to pay God the ransom for his life. Then in verse 15 the psalmist says, “But God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah.” This is what gives the psalmist confidence that there is no need to fear “when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches” (49:5-6, ESV). The psalmist recognizes that “their graves are their homes forever [לְעוֹלָם], their dwelling place to all generations [49:11]” [לְדֹר וָדֹר, ESV). He says, “This is the path of those who have foolish confidence ... they are appointed for Sheol; ... and the upright shall rule over them in the morning” (49:13-14, ESV). The psalmist’s reason for confidence is that seeing שְׁחָת is the lot of *the wicked*, but *the upright* will be ransomed from the hand of Sheol and received by God.

Similarly, the phrase “dwell securely” is often said to refer merely to this life. A. A. Anderson argues, “It is unlikely that the reference is to the body in the grave, as suggested by LXX and the NT. This expression usually denotes the undisturbed security in Yahweh’s land (cf. Dt. 33:12,28; Jer. 23:6, 33:16).”²⁸ Anderson’s analysis of the other texts where this expression occurs fall short, however. In Deuteronomy, the point is that whereas God will drive out the nations who are already in the promised land, Israel will be secure in the land *forever*. The contrast is between the temporal dwelling of the other nations and the eternal dwelling of Israel. In Psalm 16, the psalmist uses the same language to speak of *flesh* dwelling securely, whereas in Deuteronomy and

²⁸ Anderson, *Psalms 1-72*, 145. See also Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 240.

Jeremiah it is the *nation* that dwells securely. Therefore the use of this expression elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible suggests that the phrase *does* connote *eternal* security.

This is confirmed by the uses in Jeremiah. Both references are messianic passages where Jeremiah speaks of David's "righteous branch [who] will be called 'Yahweh our Righteousness'" coming and saving Judah and causing Israel to "dwell securely." Once again, the dwelling is seen to be *forever*. As Jeremiah 33:17-18 says, "For this is what the Lord says: There will not be cut off to David a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel, and to the levitical priests there will not be cut off a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings and to burn grain offerings and to make a sacrifice all the days." So Jeremiah not only uses the expression to refer to *eternal* dwelling, but he also links that idea to the messiah's coming. David applies the language of the nation's eternal security to his own flesh.²⁹ Whether he linked that truth with the coming of the messiah or not is not indicated in this text, but it is far more likely based on verse 9 that David is speaking of eternal salvation rather than an immediate deliverance. So rather than echoing other psalms that call for immediate deliverance, as Kraus suggests, this psalm echoes the language of eternity, and it is clearly the afterlife that David has in mind. To confirm this we will now provide an exegesis of Psalm 16 MT to demonstrate that the meaning in the LXX was indeed the same meaning that the original human author intended.

Exegesis of Psalm 16 MT

The Psalm begins with a call for the Lord to keep (רָשַׁם) the psalmist.

Obviously this sets the tone, but whether the psalmist intends this to be taken in the sense

²⁹ For example, see Hosea 6:2 and Ezekiel 37:1-14. See also Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 218-239.

of being kept through an immediate danger or eternally cannot be determined from this word alone. Notably there is no reference in the psalm to an immediate danger, whereas the psalm ends with the word לְעוֹלָם (“forever”). This word, too, is not an automatic indicator that eternity is in view, since it is sometimes used to speak of a long but not infinite amount of time (2 Sam 2:26; Job 36:7; Ps 74:1, 3; Jer 15:18; Lam 5:20; Amos 1:11; 8:7; Hab 1:4), but it may give a hint toward the direction לְעוֹלָם is headed, and as we will see below, eternity is likely in view at that point.

At the end of verse 1 the psalmist gives the reason for God to keep him – “for in you I take refuge.” Once again it is uncertain whether the psalmist is speaking of an immediate threat or his desire to be kept eternally. In verse 2 a little more clarity is added, though again it could be taken either way. The psalmist says, “I say to YHWH, ‘You are my Lord; my good is not beyond you.’” While the last clause is a little tricky, it seems like what the psalmist is saying is that God is the only source of goodness for him. The Lord is his only delight. This is similar to Psalm 27:4 where the psalmist says, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (ESV). He is satisfied only in God.

Verses 3 is extremely difficult to translate, and many have concluded that the text is corrupt.³⁰ Most modern translations render this in a way similar to the ESV: “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight” (see NIV, NRSV, NASB, Luther Bibel 1912, Louis Segond, etc.). In this case the psalmist would be acknowledging that just as all of his good is in God, he delights in the people of

³⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 234; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 175; etc.

God. Mitchell Dahood suggests that this verse should be translated, “As for the holy ones who *were* in the land, and the mighty ones in whom *was* all my delight” (italics added). He then takes קְדוֹשִׁים (“the holy ones”) to be the false gods and assumes the psalmist is a convert and is now speaking a curse over those who go after the gods he used to worship.³¹ Kraus proposes some emendations toward the LXX and translates the verse, “For the saints on earth is his desire, in them he glorifies his entire will to save.” In this reading the קְדוֹשִׁים are the Levitical priests whom God saves.³² Craigie is wise here to caution against building too much on “too fragile a foundation,”³³ but let us suggest that if we follow either the modern translations or Dahood’s rendering this verse is a continuation of the thought in verse 2, that all of the psalmist’s good is in God.

Verse 4 acknowledges that the sorrows of idolaters will increase, and the psalmist says he refuses to pour out “their drink offerings of blood” or to take their names upon his lips. Again the line of thought begun in verse 2 is continued.

This line of thought culminates in verses 5-6, where the psalmist says, “YHWH is my portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.” Again, he sees God as everything to him (“my portion and my cup”), and he trusts that what God has in store for him is pleasant and beautiful. The word translated “portion” here is חֵלֶק, which usually refers either to the land someone received in the conquest or to an award that awaits someone. Rather than having land or booty as his portion, the psalmist is looking forward to God himself as his portion. To summarize this stanza, then, all of the psalmist’s hope is in

³¹ Dahood, *Psalms 1*, 86-88. See also Craigie, *Psalms 1-72*, 153-155.

³² Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 233-237.

³³ Craigie, *Psalms 1-72*, 157.

God and he is happy with what is in store for him (his “inheritance”). None of this is decisive enough to establish whether or not the psalm is speaking eschatologically, but if it is one can see the psalmist’s eschatological hope – his desire to enjoy the Lord forever. Determining whether or not this is in view needs to happen at a different point in the psalm, however.

Verse 7 marks a transition.³⁴ The psalmist speaks of the Lord’s counsel and instruction at night. This verse is also not decisive in establishing whether the psalmist is speaking of eternal salvation or immediate deliverance, but a few observations can be made. First, an immediate danger does not seem to be in view. Instead it is God’s counsel that leads the psalmist to bless the LORD. Likely the psalmist is referring here to revelation the Lord has given him that he will not be shaken, but it is difficult to say anything about this verse with certainty.

Finally we come to the verses that are seen as significant in establishing the meaning of this psalm. It is beginning with verse 8 that the Psalm gets quoted in Acts, and it is beginning here that Schaper discusses this psalm as having added eschatology in the LXX. Verse 8 says, “I have set YHWH before me continually; because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken.” The basis for the psalmist’s confidence is given – it is the fact that he has placed his trust in YHWH. Nothing here establishes whether the confidence is in eternal salvation or immediate deliverance.

Verse 9 then says, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also dwells securely.” Here the psalmist expresses the joy his whole being has.

³⁴ Gregory V. Trull, “An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10,” *BSac* 161 (2004): 304-321, esp. p. 306.

That his flesh is in view is obvious by the last phrase, and we have already established the sense of the phrase “dwells securely.” This is an echo of eternity language.

This is confirmed by verse 10. We have already argued that *שָׁחָת* means “corruption,” and the context here is the corruption that happens in Sheol. David has just said his flesh will be secure, and now he gives the reason – verse 10 begins with the causal conjunction *כִּי* (“for”). The reason for his flesh’s security is that God would not abandon (*עָזַב*) his soul to Sheol or give his *הָסִיד* to experience corruption. We have already argued that *לְרֵאוֹת שָׁחָת* is best understood as “experience corruption.” David has confidence that as God’s *הָסִיד*, one who has been faithful to God’s covenant, God would not abandon him by letting him stay in Sheol and become utterly corrupt. In David’s mind, the fact that he has placed God continually before him is an indicator that God would place David continually before Him. The relationship of *דָּוָה* is a two-way relationship. This is why David will not experience corruption. This is why David’s flesh dwells securely.

Verse 11 is the climax of the psalm. In this verse the psalmist speaks of God’s revelation to him of “the path of life,” which is “fullness of joy with your presence, pleasures in your right hand forever.” As an isolated verse it could be taken in one of two ways: It could be, with Craigie, “not the afterlife, but the fullness of life here and now which is enriched by the rejoicing which emerges from an awareness of the divine presence.”³⁵ On the other hand, God’s presence and the pleasures of his right hand could be a reference to a heavenly afterlife.³⁶ Either way this is a return to the theme of verses 2-6, that the source of the psalmist’s happiness is the hope that he will be in God’s

³⁵ Craigie, *Psalms 1-72*, 158.

³⁶ Dahood, *Psalms 1*, 91, points to Ugaritic parallels that use this language of eternity in the presence of deity.

presence. In view of the word לְעוֹלָם (“forever”), the language of eternity throughout the psalm, and the reference to corruption not being the psalmist’s ultimate end, it is clear that the latter interpretation is the correct one. The psalmist’s heart is glad and his glory rejoices, and his flesh also dwells securely, because God will not *ultimately* abandon him to the grave or let him see corruption. His eternal lot is securely held in God’s hand; God is his inheritance; he will enjoy God with the holy ones in the land forever.

Conclusion

In this paper we have explored two different ways of understanding Psalm 16. Though in the New Testament this passage is interpreted to be referring to resurrection, many scholars have argued that the passage was originally written as a prayer for deliverance from “an acute mortal danger” and that it is only from the Septuagint text that the resurrection application could be taken. In response to this we examined the translation technique behind Psalm 15 LXX and discovered an aim toward a conservative rendering of the Hebrew text. We also explored the meaning of לִשְׁכָּנָה and discovered that διαφορά is the best way to render the word in Greek in this instance. We explored the language of Psalm 16 and found it to be most similar to Psalm 49, which clearly speaks of the afterlife, and we also saw that the phrase “dwells securely” is not temporal as has been suggested, but eternal. Finally we looked at each verse of the Hebrew text and saw that not only does this interpretation “work” with Psalm 16, but it makes the best sense of the language the psalmist used.

Therefore the claim that the early Christian interpretation of Psalm 16 could only have arisen from the LXX is proven false. The Septuagint translator adequately communicated the sense of Psalm 16, and the New Testament interpretation,

at least as far as the application to resurrection, is the interpretation intended by the original human author.

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