

The Promise To David In Psalm 16 And Its Application In Acts 2:25-33 And 13:32-37

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Few psalms simultaneously raise as many important methodological and theological questions as does Psalm 16. Yet it was this psalm that received one of the honored places in the early Christian Church when it served as one of the Scriptural bases for Peter's message on the day of Pentecost and Paul's address at Antioch of Pisidia.

However, in spite of the high estimate given to the psalm, exegetes must squarely face the hermeneutical and theological questions arising from the distinctively messianic use made of it. Were the various fulfillments that the apostles attributed to this text explicitly present in the psalmist's purposes and consciousness when he wrote the psalm? Or was there some valid system or legitimate principle of interpretation that, while it exceeded the author's known truth-intentions, nevertheless was acceptable to God as well as to sympathetic and potentially hostile listeners?

I. The Nature Of The Messianic Hope

1. *The single meaning of the text.*

The absolute necessity of establishing a single sense to any writing, much less to Scripture, has been acknowledged by all interpreters-at least as a starting principle. As Milton Terry contended: The moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense we introduce an element of uncertainty in the sacred volume, and unsettle all scientific interpretation.¹

Likewise Louis Berkhof argued:

Scripture has but a single sense, and is therefore susceptible to a scientific and logical investigation ... To accept a manifold sense...makes any science of her-meneutics impossible and opens wide the door for all kinds of arbitrary interpretations.²

Unfortunately, many like Berkhof will turn right around and say almost in the same breath:

Scripture contains a great deal that does not find its explanation in history, nor in the secondary authors, but only in God as the *Actor primarius*.³

This raises the whole question of how far the psalmist (or any writer of Scripture) understood his own words and to what degree he was conscious of the way in which his words would be fulfilled if they pointed to some future development. Psalm 16, however, is an ideal psalm for a discussion of this question since Peter did authoritatively comment on this very question of the psalmist's understanding and precise consciousness of the future fulfillment. Therefore we believe the dictum as stated most simply by John Owen will best unlock the depths even of the messianic psalms: "If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all."⁴

1. M. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 413.

2. L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950) 57.

3. *Ibid.*, 133.

4. J. Owen as cited by Terry, *Hermeneutics*, 493.

2. *The failure of modern rationalism.*

Many fear that the result of this type of insistence will be the minimal results of a T. K. Cheyne whose blunt words summarize the results and attitude of another school of interpreters:

All these psalms are (let me say it again, for it concerns modern apologists to be frank) only messianic in a sense which is psychologically justifiable. They are, as I have shown, neither typically nor in the ordinary sense prophetically messianic.⁵

The difficulty evidenced in this approach is that it has failed to do justice to the Scripture writers' own sense of connection with an antecedent body of writings and the build-up of phrases, concepts, events and expectations. Furthermore, most adherents to this view insist on declaring the historical setting and internal claims of the text to be totally or partially fraudulent in favor of more "modern" but subjectively imposed settings, writers and occasions. The risks for this type of philosophy, which says that "the text is guilty until proven innocent," are extremely high.

3. *The proposals of modern hermeneutics and the testimonia.*

Contemporary hermeneutical discussions have focused on the questions of the meaning of language, the ability of one generation to understand another generation removed from it by a great interval of time, and hermeneutical presuppositions or pre-understandings used by one generation, such as the NT writers, to understand another, such as the OT writers.

In the Biblical field, one of the topics that has attracted much attention has been the NT use of OT quotations. One theme that appears to be emerging amidst all the diversity is that the OT Scriptures were read with a pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) that allowed what had happened of old in the OT to be contemporary happenings in the NT.

Especially important was the suggestion that there existed a collection of OT texts known as *testimonia*⁶ that could serve as a quarry from which the NT writers could cite to prove their contention that Jesus was the expected Messiah. While some of these texts had been regarded as being messianic in the Jewish community, most, it was felt, were simply attributed to the OT text by the NT writers in a subjective way.

The rationale for this type of pre-understanding on the part of the NT writers varies among contemporary scholars. Some attempted to explain this alleged gap between the OT writer's meaning and the apparently new use made of that OT text by the Christian community and the apostolic writers as a new work of the Holy Spirit. That is the point of Prosper Grech:

5. T. K. Cheyne, *The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891) 340.

6. The pioneer work on the *testimonia* was done by J. R. Harris, *Testimonies*, 2 vols. (Cambridge; 1916, 1920). C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Collins, 1952), argued that there were fifteen such texts. See also B. Lindars' *New Testament Apologetic* (London; 1961). In a table given by S. Amslet, *L'Ancien Testament dans l'Eglise* (Neuchatel; 1960) 137 if., five texts refer originally to Yahweh, twelve to the king, two to David, two to a prophet and eleven to a just man.

The Holy Spirit is not only the author of the written word, but also of its interpretation. Earle Ellis remarks [*Paul's Use of the OT* (London: 1957), 25ff] rightly that although all Scripture is the work of the Spirit, if it is not interpreted according to the Spirit, it remains *gramma*, not *graphē*.⁷

In other words the text has been invested with a pregnant meaning whose plenary senses (*sensus plenior*) are known to the Holy Spirit and released as he will to those who are spiritually prepared to receive them.

The text most frequently cited as a basis for this teaching is 1 Cor 2:14: "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Is this then to be used as some kind of precedent for bypassing the otherwise dreary tools employed in exegetical skills?

Daniel Fuller⁸ has shown the weakness of that whole line of argumentation. The word "to receive" (*dechomai*) in 1 Cor 2:14 means "to welcome with pleasure, willingly, and earnestly." Had the word been *lambanō*, then the idea would have been simply "to receive something." Furthermore, the word for "know" (*ginōskō*) means not just perceiving a thing as such but "embracing things as they really are."⁹ Thus there are not two or more logics, meanings and interpretations that are to be found in Scripture—as if one was apparent and objectively realizable while the others were spiritual, mysterious and occasionally available. Is this not a confusion of the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of illumination at this point?

To insist that the Holy Spirit interrupts the hermeneutical process with a new—even messianic—meaning is to proudly argue that another divine revelation has taken place in the interpreter's experience while he, the exegete, was looking at an ancient text. And that precisely was Barth's argument: The locus of revelation was a believer waiting for a divine encounter as he bent over the Holy Scriptures. But surely Barth and those holding to these plenary views are confounding the necessary work of the Holy Spirit in illumination, application and personally applying a text with the original scope and content of that text in the singular act of revelation to the writer.

Is this error that far removed from contemporary philosophical exegetical systems such as Georg Gadamer's theory, which stresses the reader's perception of the text to the detriment of the author who first penned that text? According to Gadamer, the text is to be read from the reader's own horizons, situations and questions that he brings to that text. Thus a fusion is made between the text (as stripped from its author and his meanings) and the outlook of the reader. Rather than accepting the charge that such a procedure is arbitrary or even subjective, Gadamer believes it is

7. P. Grech, "The 'Testimonia' and Modern Hermeneutics," *NTS* 19 (1972–73) 321.

8. D. P. Fuller, "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation* (ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 190-193.

9. As cited by Fuller in *ibid.*, 191, from *TDNT* 1, 690.

more than tolerable since both the written text and the reader share the same real world that shaped both text and reader. Accordingly when the reader interrogates the text with his own previously devised questions, the text “explains” the reader as much as the reader makes the text speak.

But all of this discussion leaves untouched the matter of validation: which “reading” of the text is valid. But then, of course, we have just spoiled everything and mentioned that word no one in the last third of the twentieth century is supposed to talk about: “truth.” Yet is not that the same issue for all pneumatic theories of meaning as well? How can I validate my meaning that I now attribute to the Holy Spirit? And if the apostles claim they found such plenary meanings in the OT only by aid of the Holy Spirit in them as authors of Scripture, why must they appeal to the OT or to their audiences for approval of that which they say has already been received among their listeners?

4. An alternative solution to the messianic psalms problem.

We would urge, as a solution to the problem of retaining a single meaning to the text while doing full justice to legitimate messianic claims, that a blend of views between the ancient Antiochian concept of theōria and Willis J. Beecher’s¹⁰ concept of promise (or epangelical) theology be adopted.

According to Antioch, God gave the prophets (in our case the psalmist) a vision (theōria, from theōrein, “to look, gaze at”) of the future in which the recipient saw as intimate parts of one meaning the word for his own historical day with its needs (historia) and that word for the future. Both the literal historical sense and the fulfillment were conceived as one piece. Both were intimate parts of one total whole work of God.

Beecher, in our view, added to this emphasis on a single meaning vision for the present and distant future by stressing the fact that more was involved in this vision than the word spoken prior to the event and the fulfilling event itself. There was the common plan of God in which both the word, the present historical realization and the distant realization shared. Often these parts of the plan of God, known as his covenantal promise, were generic or corporate terms (such as “seed,” “my son,” “Servant of the Lord,” “first-born”) that were deliberately used to include the historical antecedents as well as the realities yet to come. Also, the promise embraced yet another perspective in its single meaning: the means that God used to fulfill that word in the contemporary environment of the prophetic speaker and the result or even series of results that issued forth from that word as they lined up with the past and the future. For every historical fulfillment of the promise was at once a fulfillment and a sample, earnest or guarantee of whatever climactic event it likewise often pointed forward to by virtue of the wholeness and singularity of meaning in that word. We believe such to be the case in the psalm we have selected

10. (W. J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975 [1905])).

as a sample of a more consistent hermeneutical handling of the messianic feature in the psalmist's words.

II. Psalm 16

1. *The author and contents of the psalm.*

While few commentators have laid much stress on the fact that the title designates David either as the author ("from David") or the one praised in the psalm ("to David"), Franz Delitzsch¹¹ and E. W. Hengstenberg¹² have listed numerous points of contact between the phrases used in this psalm and other better-known Davidic hymns. They include: v 1—Pss 7:1; 11:1: "in you ! take refuge"; v 5—Ps 11:6: "my portion, my cup"; v 8—15:5; 10:6: "I shall not be moved"; v 9—4:8: "dwell securely"; v 10—4:3: "your favored one"; v 11—17:7, 15; 21:6; 109:31: "at your right hand"; "joy of your presence." This evidence is very compelling, but when the NT apostles also attribute the psalm to David the matter should pose no further concern, for both lines of argument now match.

The special events in David's life that occasioned this psalm are much more difficult and probably will never be known for certain. Three major suggestions for its placement are (1) a severe sickness after David had finished his own cedar palace (Delitzsch), (2) his stay at Ziklag¹³ among the Philistines (2 Samuel 30) when he may have been tempted to worship idols (Hitzig), and (3) David's word under the influence of Nathan's prophecy (2 Samuel 7) about his future dynasty, kingdom and throne (Lange's *Commentary*). If we had to side with one view, we would choose the last one because of the scope of Nathan's prophecy and the linkage made in Psalm 16.

The contents of Psalm 16 are as follows. Rather than expressing any sudden emergency, the psalmist is jubilant with a joy and happiness that knows few bounds. David has placed himself under the overlordship of his suzerain, Yahweh (v 1), whom he describes as his "portion" (v 5) and his "inheritance" (v 6). There is not another good in addition to the Lord. Thus David delights in the company of fellow worshippers of God (v 3), but he detests all whose lips and lives serve false gods (v 4). From such a fellowship and enjoyment of God comes counsel, admonishment and protection (vv 7-9). And then the most remarkable consequence of all as the psalmist suddenly reverts to the imperfect tense in v 9b: He, who is God's "holy one" (ḥāṣīd), rests confidently in the fact that neither he nor God's everlasting "seed" (here called ḥāṣīd) will

11. F. Delitzsch, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 1. 217.

12. E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Psalms* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1851), 1. 231.

13. The title to Psalm 16 calls this psalm a miktām, which is the name also used of Psalms 56, 57 and 59 all written during David's exile and Saul's persecution of him. However, miktām is probably only a musical term and not one that denotes types of content since the style, sentiment and expressions are different from those found in Psalm 16 (so De Wette had argued according to Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* [abridged by T. K. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970] 78).

be abandoned in the grave, but the God who has made the promise will be the God in whose presence he will experience fullness of joy and pleasures forever.

2. *The exegesis¹⁴ and informing theology to Psalm 16.*

The psalmist begins with no vague subjective plea such as “Save me, for I believe you can!” Neither does he plead any merit based on what he had done for God, but as W. Robertson Smith pointed out, “He pleads a covenant relation to God.”¹⁵

a. *The covenant relationship.* The word *hāsâ*, “I have committed myself to you” as used in a secular sense in Judg 9:15 and Isa 30:2, meant that a vassal attached himself to a suzerain in order to enjoy his protection. Here the term pointed in a religious context to the covenant that God had made with the psalmist and his people. Thus he took refuge in that covenant and God. So enjoyable was this relationship that the psalmist found that he had no other good or wealth apart from God. Everything he recognized as being of value or worth, God actually contained in himself, hymned the psalmist.

b. *The portion and inheritance.* What had been measured out to David according to God’s grace was a “portion” or “inheritance” that was nothing less than Yahweh himself. It was in the same sense that Yahweh had been declared to distinctively be the Levites’ “portion” and “inheritance” (Num 18:20, 24) in that they received no assignment in the division of the territory of the land. Later in Jer 10:16 the Lord will be described as the “portion” of the whole nation of Israel. It comes as no surprise then to find that Pss 119:57; 142:5 present individual believers addressing God as “my portion.” Likewise, what had been measured out by lines or measuring tapes¹⁶ were not “portions” in this world but the “inheritance” of spiritual joys, chief among which was God himself in his presence, grace and fellowship.

“Therefore,” concludes the psalmist in v 9, “my flesh shall rest secure because you will not abandon (or leave) me to Sheol (or “in the grave”); you will not permit your “holy one” (*hāsîdkâ*) to experience corruption.” One of the most frequently asked questions is whether these clauses are a reference to the hope for the psalmist’s future resurrection or rather an expression of his confidence that God will watch over his earthly body as well as his spirit and preserve him from physical harm and death.

14. In addition to the usual commentaries, we found these articles on the psalm: W. R. Smith, “The Sixteenth Psalm,” *Expositor* 4 (1881) 341-372; S. R. Driver, “The Method of Studying the Psalter: Psalm 16,” *Expositor*, Seventh Series, 10 (1910) 26-37; H. W. Boers, “Psalm 16 and the Historical Origin of the Christian Faith,” *ZAW* 60 (1969) 105-110; A. Schmitt, “Ps. 16, 8–11 als Zeugnis der Auferstehung in der Apostelgeschichte,” *BZ* 17 (1973) 229-248.

15. Smith, “Sixteenth Psalm,” 342.

16. See the same phrase in Josh 17:5. J. J. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966 [1878]), 1. 194, says: “The line was said to ‘fall’ as being ‘thrown’ by lot! See Micah ii.5.” For the theology of this term see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 126-130, esp. n. 12.

c. “*The favorite one*” (ḥāšîd). The answer to this question will depend, in our view, more upon the identity, meaning and significance of the “favorite one” (ḥāšîd) than upon a discussion of the words for “security,” “grave” and “corruption.” In fact, the reason this passage should ever have been linked to the Messiah along with the Davidic speaker rests on the proper understanding of the term ḥāšîd.¹⁷ As a messianic term, it is only surpassed by “Servant of the Lord” and “Messiah” in the OT.¹⁸

Despite a large measure of skepticism among current scholars, we believe ḥāšîd is best rendered in a passive form,¹⁹ “one to whom God is loyal, gracious or merciful” or “one in whom God manifests his grace and favor,” rather than in an active form as “one who is loyal to God.” In form it may be either active or passive, and thus it is only context that will make the final decision.

In Psalm 4 David claimed that he was Yahweh’s ḥāšîd: “Realize that Yahweh has set apart for himself a ḥāšîd “ (4:4 Hebrew). Accordingly, all attempts to frustrate David by evil deeds would be futile. The reason for this confidence can be found in Ps 18:26 (=2 Sam 22:26), a psalm where David celebrates the Lord’s deliverance from all his enemies: “With a ḥāšîd, you (O Lord) will manifest yourself ḥāšîd “ (the *hithpael* form of the verb). Thus a ḥāšîd, a “favored one,” denoted a person in whom God’s divine graciousness was specially manifested. More often than not, the special loving-kindness intended was that which the Lord first announced to Abraham, to Israel and to the dynasty of David.

One of the key passages that connects our term ḥāšîd with David is Ps 89:20–21 (English 19–20): “Of old you spoke to your favored one in a vision and said: I have set the crown on a hero, I have exalted from the people a choice person. I have found David my servant (a messianic term in Isaiah) with my holy oil and I have anointed him (another messianic concept).” What else can we conclude except that in the psalmist’s view Yahweh’s ḥāšîd, king, servant and anointed one are one and the same in the person, office and mission of David?

As early as Moses’ era (Deut 33:8) there is a reference to “the man of thy ḥāšîd whom thou (Israel) didst test at Massah” (a reference to Exodus 17 where water came from the rock). The only “man” who was tested and put to the proof in Exod 17:2, 7 was the Lord! Could not this

17. ḥāšîd occurs 32 times and only in poetic texts, never in prose. Beside 25 examples in the Psalms it appears in Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 2:9; 2 Sam 22:26 (duplicated in Ps 18:26); Prov 2:8; Jer 3:12; Mic 7:2; 2 Chron 6:41 (duplicated in Ps 132:9). In 17 cases it is plural, 11 times it is singular and 4 times there are variant readings.

18. This is the judgment of Beecher, *Prophets*, 313.

19. The noun and adjectival pattern, according to Hupfeld on Ps 4:4, is like ‘āsîr, “one who is bound, a prisoner,” or qāšîr, “what is gathered, the harvest”; so BDB, 339.

clear association of the Lord with the term *ḥāšîd* have been the background against which David also understood the term of himself as it is now granted in a new revelation? Likewise Hannah spoke of the coming *ḥāšîd*, “the horn of his anointed one” (1 Sam 2:9–10), the same association of concepts made in Ps 89:17–21.

Rowley argues²⁰ that the most decisive evidence in favor of the active meaning is that the word is used of God in Ps 145:17 and Jer 3:12. But these instances are no different than Deut 33:8, for the *ḥāšîd* is not only the one to whom favor comes because of some distinctive office or mission but also the one in whom such favor resides. Because Yahweh was himself *ḥāšîd*, Israel was invited to return to him (Jer 3:12), just as he was “righteous in all his ways and *ḥāšîd* in all his deeds” (Ps 145:17). In other words, Yahweh is first declared to be just and *ḥāšîd* before he begins to manifest such characteristics to others.

Neither are the 17 examples of the plural form, “favored ones,” a problem for our messianic view. The oscillation between the one and the many is exactly what we observe in such parallel examples as “seed,” “anointed one,” “servant” and “first-born.”

In Psalm 16, then, David is God’s *ḥāšîd*, “favored one,” yet not David as a mere person but David as the recipient and conveyor of God’s ancient but ever-renewed promise. Therefore as Beecher concluded:

The man David may die, but the *hhasidh* is eternal. Just as David is the Anointed One, and yet the Anointed One is eternal; just as David is the Servant, and yet the Servant is eternal; so David is the *hhasidh*, and yet the *hhasidh* is eternal. David as an individual went to the grave, and saw corruption there, but the representative of Yahaweh’s [*sic*] eternal promise did not cease to exist.²¹

The MT has the plural form, “thy favored ones,” while the marginal reading is singular. In this instance the margin with its singular form is to be adopted since it is supported by the largest number of MSS and the best.²² While the plural reading is the more difficult text and therefore

20. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1956) 130 n. 1: “It is quite impossible to suppose that when God says [in Jer. 3:12] ‘I am *ḥāšîdh*’ he means that he has been treated with *ḥesedh*, since the whole burden of the verse is that he has not.”

21. Beecher, *Prophets*, 325.

22. See Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 76 n. 6; 77 nn. 2, 3; Perowne, *Psalms*, 200 n. 1. C. B. Moll, *The Psalms: Lange’s Commentary* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1872) 126 added this explanation: “The Masora likewise says, *yod* is not pronounced. Thus if this had read in the MSS. *ḥāsedekā* as now likewise some, and especially ancient Spanish Codd, have it, this is not to be regarded as plural, but as singular, and indeed so that it is not so much to be regarded as the so-called emphatic plural or plural of majesty (. . . after the ancient interpreters) as rather the *yod* is to be considered as, Gen. xvi. 5; Ps. ix. 14; ,let. xlvi. 15, as a sign of the *seghol*.”

that which the canons of textual criticism would ordinarily favor, the weight of the external evidence overbalances any use of that rule in this situation.

3. *The path of life* (vv 9b-11).

The fact that David had a direct consciousness that God was his Lord and his inheritance not only cheered his heart but also allowed his body (bāšār)²³ to share in this joy as well. His “body would dwell in safety” (v 9b) mainly because Yahweh’s hāšîd would not experience the “pit” (from the root šûah, “to sink down”) or “corruption” (from the root ,šāhâ, “to go to ruin”).

It is difficult to decide between the renderings “pit” and “corruption.” Most interpreters will agree that our word šahat does occur in Job 17:4 meaning “corruption” where it stands in parallelism to rimmâ, “worm,” and that all the ancient versions render our passage “corruption.” But that ends the agreement. The parallelism appears to favor “pit”; yet “corruption” is every bit as fitting²⁴—especially if šyôl is uniformly rendered “grave,” as it should be, and not “the underworld” or “pit.”²⁵

The expression “to see corruption” may be determined by the opposite phrase, “to see life” (=“to abide, to remain alive”).²⁶ Likewise the preceding clause, “to abandon” (‘āzab) with the preposition l^c signifies “to give up to (another)” as if the grave were here personified as an insatiable animal that will be overpowered.²⁷

David expects to arrive safely with his immaterial and material being in the presence of God, just because God has promised the future of his “favored one” (hāšîd). The God who was the God of the living and not of the dead would be David’s God in life and in death, lighting the path to life with its pleasure and joy afterwards in the presence of God.

23. My student, Ken Burdick, has suggested the remote possibility that bāšār might mean here “kindred, blood-relation” (BDB, 142, def. 4), as in Gen 37:27; Isa 58:7. David’s hope then would be that his posterity would not be cut off. The text seems to parallel “heart” and “glory” or “liver” too closely for that suggestion.

24. Mo11, *Psalms*, 126, says: “The ancient Jews have had so little doubt (that šahat meant ‘corruption’), that from it has originated the rabbinical fable, that the body of David has never decayed.”

25. For confirmation of this thesis see R. L. Harris, “The Meaning of Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts,” *BETS* 4 (1961) 129-135; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University Press, 1946) 180 if.

26. Perowne, *Psalms*, 201.

27. M. Dahood, *Psalms* (AB; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1965), 1. 91.

The “path of life” for the psalmist was “eternal life” even as Dahood has argued from Ugaritic sources where ḥayyīm, even for that early and—for some—primitive age, was used in parallelism with “immortality.”²⁸

III. Peter And Paul’s Use Of Psalm 16

Our argument has been that the identity, office and function of the “favored one” (ḥāsīd) is critical to a proper understanding of the single meaning of the psalmist. Another confirmation of the adequacy of this view can be found in Paul’s message at Antioch of Pisidia where he boldly connected “the holy and sure blessings of David” (ta hosia David ta pista) as announced by Isa 55:3 with the quote from Ps 16:10 that “thou wilt not let thy ‘Favored One’ see corruption” (ou dōseis ton hosion sou idein diaphthoran).

Isaiah is as clear as Paul was on the fact that “the sure mercies of David” were not David’s acts of mercy toward God but rather the results of God’s grace being poured out on David as a recipient of the unfolding promise of God. While André Caquot²⁹ and W. A.M. Beuken³⁰ have argued for a subjective genitive, H. G. M. Williamson³¹ has handily demonstrated that an objective genitive is what Isaiah intended here. David was God’s man of promise who received the renewal of the covenant (2 Samuel 7) that was made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that included those gifts (the root is ḥesed) that Yahweh had faithfully promised to bestow on Israel and through Israel to all the nations on the face of the earth. Thus it involved no hermeneutical error for Paul to connect the psalmist’s ḥāsīd, “favored one,” with Isaiah’s ḥasdê, “mercies” (or, better, “graces”). He clearly understood the essence of the OT promise or blessing of God.

Most recent NT commentators, however, see it differently. Paul is interpreted as using the rabbinical practice of associating passages merely on the basis of similar catchwords. The most quoted passage is from Lake and Cadbury:³²

When the Rabbis found a phrase which could not be explained by any ordinary method in its own context they interpreted by “analogy,” that is, they found the same word in some other place where its meaning was clear, and interpreted the obscure passage in the light of the intelligible one. Here, hosia is unintelligible; therefore the writer takes another passage in which the adjective hosios is used substantially, Ps. xvi. 10, “thou wilt not give thy holy *one*—hosion—to see corruption,” and introduces it by dioti, to show that this is the justification for his

28. Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 77 n. 5.

29. A. Caquot, “Les ‘Graces de David’ a pos d’Isaie 55:3b,” *Sem* 15 (1965) 45-59.

30. W. A.M. Beuken, “Isa. 55:3–5: Reinterpretation of David,” *Bijdragen* 35 (1974) 49-64.

31. H. G. M. Williamson, “‘The Sure Mercies of David’: Subjective or Objective Genitive?,” *JSS* 23 (1978) 31-49.

32. K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 4. 155–156.

interpretation, and that by perfectly correct Rabbinical reasoning *ta hoshia* means the Resurrection ... It is very important to notice that the whole argument is based on the LXX and disappears if the speech be not in Greek.

But if what we have argued above is correct, such as the writer's intention when he used *hāsīd* or employed the objective genitive, then the exegesis of Lake and Cadbury is entirely wrong. The case does not depend on Paul's use of Greek in that speech anymore than the claim that *ta hoshia ta pista* is unintelligible. Moreover, when Paul introduces Ps 16:10 with *dioti*, "therefore," he "clearly marks out that which follows as an inferential clause, adduced to demonstrate that the resurrection was a part of the realization of the holy and sure blessings promised to David."³³

In fact, rather than being unintelligible the situation was just the reverse for, as Lövestam³⁴ explained, Paul had already (Acts 13:23) made reference to the blessings God had given to David. There can be little doubt that Paul's citation of Isaiah refers to the covenant promised to David. Lövestam correctly conjectures that the rendering of Isa 55:3 as *ta hoshia* may have been motivated by a desire to use Greek words similar in sound to the Hebrew originals.

Peter in Acts 2:25–33 does not fare any better at the hands of his commentators. In fact, S. R. Driver opined:

It is difficult not to think that the application of the words to Christ found in Acts ii. 25–31, xiii. 35–37 was facilitated by the mistranslations of the Septuagint ... But the apostles used arguments of the kind usual at the time, and such as would seem cogent both to themselves and to their contemporaries.³⁵

Yet that conclusion hardly does justice to Peter's claim that David was a "prophet"³⁶ who did indeed "foresee" (*proidōn*) and also knowingly spoke about (*peri*) the resurrection of Messiah when he wrote Psalm 16 (Acts 2:30–31). Acts 2:25 carefully introduces the quotation from Ps 16:8–11 with the phrase, "David says with reference to (*eis*) him," rather than "concerning (*peri*) him" (which would have meant that the total reference was of the Messiah alone). But Peter is most insistent that his understanding of Psalm 16 is not a novel interpretation: It was David's own view. Thus any belief that the psalm had been accommodated to contemporary fancies or

33. A. M. Harman, "Paul's Use of the Psalms" (unpublished Th.D. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1968) 40.

34. E. Lövestam: *Son and Saviour: A Study of Acts 13:32–37* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961) 71-87. He adds on p. 84: "With regard to Ps. 16:10... it is expressly combined with the promise to David: David's covenant is quoted there as foundation and justification for the psalm saying's reference and application to Jesus' resurrection. This is of importance for the understanding of the connection of the quotation from Ps. 16:10 with the promise to David in Acts 13:34f."

35. Driver, "Method," 36.

36. J. A. Fitzmyer, "David, Being Therefore a Prophet (Acts 2:30)," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 332-339.

subjected to a reinterpretation fails to grapple with the apostle's own claim: Psalm 16, not Peter (or Paul), made these claims for Christ and his resurrection.

The charge by H. W. Boers³⁷ that Acts 2:24 is the real evidence that Psalm 16 was reinterpreted with its word “pangs (ōdinas) of death” as if the Hebrew read ḥēbel, “pain” or “pang,” instead of ḥēbel, “cord, rope, line” (the plural of both Hebrew words being indistinguishable), must likewise fail. In Boers' eyes it was the word association of Ps 16:6 (“lines have fallen to me in pleasant places”) with vv 8–11 of that chapter that caused the Lord's disciples to refer it to Jesus' death since the same word was used in Ps 18:5 (“the lines of death surround me”) and was understood as a reference there to the death of Jesus. Thus he contends that Ps 16:8–11 was originally interpreted as predicting the death, not the resurrection of Jesus. Only later, we are assured by Boers, did the Church reverse itself and see Jesus' resurrection in Psalm 16.

However, Peter does not pretend to quote Psalm 16:6 in Acts 2:24. The artificiality of the suggestion is most evident from the ponderous conclusions Boers attached to this tenuous exegesis. Even if Ps 18:5 is also quoted in Acts 2:24 (and it may be so), Peter's failure to start his citation at v 6 rather than the v 8 that he chose certainly should put this suggestion to rest. Rather, Peter felt his exegesis rested squarely on the revelatory word given to David.

IV. Conclusion

Without injecting any contrived artifices of dualism, docetism or spiritual hermeneutics, we believe that David, as the man of promise and as God's ḥāṣīd (“favored one”), was in his person, office and function one of the distinctive historical fulfillments to that word that he received about his seed, dynasty and throne. Therefore he rested secure in the confident hope that even death itself would not prevent him from enjoying the face-to-face fellowship with his Lord even beyond death, since that ultimate ḥāṣīd would triumph over death. For David, this was all one word: God's ancient but ever-new promise.

37. Boers, “Psalm 16, ” 108.