



Psalm 16 - Song of Trust and Security in God

A Miktam of David.

Introduction

When the faithful sing Psalm 16, they entrust themselves to the Lord and foster their confidence and contentment in his care. The Psalm uses imagery from Israel's allocation of the land (vv.5-6) to express contentment in this life, and goes on to look forward to everlasting life in God's presence (vv.9-11).

The title *Miktam* is commonly understood as golden; although others think it is related to a word meaning to cover. Since the Psalms with this title, i.e. 16 and 56-60, are written in times of peril, some think the idea is of covering the lips in the sense of secrecy, as if this were a secret or silent Psalm given in a time of crisis. This is a wonderful Psalm relating how David found the secret of contentment and great gladness even in pressing times; and also speaks powerfully of Jesus and his work for humankind.

Psalm 16:1-2 - The Lord Is My Refuge.

The Lord is the only one on whom the psalmist relies for well-being, i.e. <<**no good apart from you**>> (v.2).

- 1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
- 2 I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.'

Psalm 16:1-2

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. It seems that David wrote this Psalm from a time of trouble, because he asked for preservation, took confidence in that he would not be moved (v.8), and had confidence in some kind of resurrection

(v.10). Yet the tone of this Psalm is not despair or complaint; it is settled joy. Despite his trouble, David had a praising confidence in his God.

You are my Lord. This is what David's soul had said to the Lord. David happily said that Yahweh (Lord) was his master (Lord). David knew how to speak to his own soul; Psalms 42:6 and 43:5 are other examples. It is a good thing to speak good things to one's own soul.

I have no good apart from you. David knew that, even at his very best, all of his goodness was nothing apart from God: <<***Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you***>> (Psalm 73:25).

- It was nothing when it came to making David righteous before God; he needed God to bring his righteousness to David.
- It was nothing because David's goodness was itself a gift of God; therefore apart from him it was nothing.
- It was nothing because David's goodness, as precious as it was, was of small value without his relationship with God.

Psalm 16:3-4 - My Preferred Company: The Godly.

There is a contrast between 'the holy ones' 'in whom is all my delight' (v.3), and those who run after another god (v.4), referring to idolaters, among whom would be unfaithful Israelites, whose practices the faithful will shun.

³ As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.

Psalm 16:3

The holy ones, that is, the saints. All Israel is holy in the sense of being consecrated to the God who is himself holy: <<***Indeed, O favourite among peoples, all his holy ones were in your charge; they marched at your heels, accepted direction from you***>> (Deuteronomy 33:3). This does not guarantee, however, that every member of Israel will actually live out his holy status, and thus the command to be holy: <<***Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the Lord; I sanctify you***>> (Leviticus 20:7-8). Here, **the holy ones** are those who have actually embraced their privilege; these are the ones whom the faithful singers should esteem, and whose company they should prefer.

David delighted in the people of God, despite all their failings, scandals, and embarrassments. This is an obvious failing for many followers of Jesus Christ today. They are so negative about the people of God that they find themselves unable to see any excellence in the God's people, unable to delight in them.

- 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.

Psalm 16:4

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows. David understood that those who served other gods found many sorrows in life. David knew that his life, lived after God, was not an easy one. He experienced many hardships because he remained faithful to God. Nevertheless, he also knew that life lived after another god was even more difficult. It was the attitude of Peter: <<***Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God'***>> (John 6:66-69).

Their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out. David allowed his knowledge of the futility of pagan beliefs to effect his behaviour. Therefore, he would not follow the pagans in their vain practices.

The psalmist utterly refuses to participate in idolatrous practices, especially those carried out by unfaithful Israelites. Their names probably refers to the names of the false gods being worshiped rather than the names of the idolaters: <<***Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips***>> (Exodus 23:13).

Psalm 16:5-6 - Contentment with My Chosen Portion.

The Psalm now describes the psalmist's satisfaction with the Lord and his provision. The terms portion, lot, lines, and heritage or inheritance evoke the allocation of the land into family plots, perhaps with an allusion to the Lord as the Levites' portion and inheritance: <<***Then the Lord said to Aaron: You shall have no allotment in their land, nor shall you have any share among them; I am your share and your possession among the Israelites***>> (Numbers 18:20); the song promotes contentment with the arrangements of one's life, seeing them as providentially ordered.

- 5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.

Psalm 16:5-6

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. After stating that there was nothing found in the pagan gods, David explained the good he received from Yahweh. David was the youngest son in a family with many sons. He could expect little inheritance from his family; yet he took joy and comfort in the fact that God was the portion of his inheritance, and he knew that he had a good inheritance. The lines that marked out his inheritance had fallen to him in pleasant places. As already noted, God said to the priests in the days of Moses: <<***I am your share and your possession***>> (Numbers 18:20). David understood that this was a promise given not only to the priests, but also to all who would trust God to be the portion of their inheritance.

You hold my lot. This described the portion of David's inheritance. David was confident that God would maintain what he had first given to him.

Psalm 16:7-8 - Delight in God's Constant Presence.

God's presence, in which the psalmist delights, is seen in the moral instruction he receives (v.7), and it results in his assurance of stability (v.8).

- 7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
- 8 I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Psalm 16:7-8

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. The false gods of the nations could never give counsel the way the Lord gave it to David: <<***The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord***>> (Isaiah 11:2). When David needed guidance, God gave it to him, and therefore David praised God. How can false gods give counsel when they are but inanimate objects: <<***Alas for you who say to the wood, 'Wake up!' to silent stone, 'Rouse yourself!' Can it teach? See, it is plated with gold and silver, and there is no breath in it at all***>> (Habakkuk 2:19), and: <<***You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods***>> (Acts 19:26).

The psalmist's heart instructs him during the night, a result of deliberate reflection, as confirmed in 1:2; likewise to keep the Lord always before me

expresses intention. This speaks of a decision David made to put God first in his life. He determined that God would always be his focus, his true perspective.

Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. This was the plain result of David's decision to put God first. There was a standing and security in David's life that would not have otherwise existed.

Psalm 16:9-11 - Hope of Everlasting Joy.

As in Psalms 49:15 and 73:24-26, here there is a clear affirmation that the human yearning to be near to God and to know the pleasure of his welcome forever, beyond the death of the body, finds its answer in the covenant. Peter cites vv.8-11 in his Pentecost speech (Acts 2:25-28), applying the verses to the resurrection of Jesus; Paul used Psalm v.10 in his similar speech: <<***Therefore he has also said in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One experience corruption"***>> (Acts 13:35). If the apostles meant that David's words were a straight prediction of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is difficult to know what function the Psalm could have played in ancient Israel: the congregation would have scratched their heads in puzzlement every time they sang it. This puzzlement goes away if the Psalm is seen as cultivating the hope of everlasting glory for the faithful, with the resurrection of Jesus, the holy one *par excellence*, as the first step in bringing this hope to fruition. This is confirmed in: <<***We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies***>> (Romans 8:22-23), <<***But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ***>> (1 Corinthians 15:23).

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.

Psalm 16:9

Therefore my heart is glad. David continued to describe the benefits of his decision to set the Lord always before him (v.8). This decision brought gladness and glory to David's life. For those who do not live out a true commitment to God, it is easy for them to think of what such a commitment costs them. This is not entirely bad, because this kind of decision to set the Lord always before one's self does have a cost, and the cost should be counted and appreciated. It may cost certain pleasures, popularity, anonymity, family relationships, life goals, career choices, financial priorities, and so forth.

My soul rejoices. The Greek in the Septuagint, which is cited in Acts 2:26, renders this as 'my tongue.'

My body also rests secure. David described a further benefit of his life decision to set the Lord always before him. It was the confidence of God's care and blessing in the life beyond. David had the settled hope, a confidence, not a simple wish, that God would not leave his soul in the grave, i.e. Sheol in v.10, but that his life would continue on in the presence of God. This statement is a wonderful declaration of trust in some sort of resurrection and afterlife. Yet the Psalms contain both such confident statements and other more doubtful words about the life beyond, such as in Psalms 6:5 and 88:11. This cloudy understanding of the afterlife in the OT does not surprise the reader of the NT, who knows that Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light: <<***but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel***>> (2 Timothy 1:10).

¹⁰ For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

Psalm 16:10

Sheol. Here it is likely the abode of the wicked. Likewise, the Pit probably describes the experience of being far from God forever. These are not likely terms for the grave, since everyone singing these words would know that his body would one day die and rot. Refer also to the comment made of Psalm 6:5.

Or let your faithful one see the Pit. Wonderfully, and perhaps unknowingly, David spoke beyond himself. In one sense David was indeed the Holy One of God, whose soul would not be left in the grave. Yet in a greater and more literal sense, only Jesus Christ fulfils this through his resurrection to life. This was perceived by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, who said that these words went beyond David who was obviously dead, buried in a grave, and whose body had long ago decayed into dust (Acts 2:25-31).

In quoting and applying this passage from Psalm 16 to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, Peter showed a remarkably sophisticated understanding of the work of Jesus on the Cross. He understood that because Jesus bore the sin of all humankind without becoming a sinner, he remained the Holy One, even in his death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable. As Peter said: <<***But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power***>> (Acts 2:24). The fact that Jesus remained God's Holy One despite the ordeal of the Cross demonstrates that Jesus bore the penalty of human sin without becoming a sinner himself. It also shows that this payment of sins was perfect and complete, the only type of payment a Holy One could make. In these ways, as Peter so clearly understood, the resurrection proves the perfection of Jesus' work on the Cross.

11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Psalm 16:11

The path of life. A master metaphor of the Bible: the covenant provides a 'path' by which one walks to life in all its fullness: <<*She does not keep straight to the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it*>> (Proverbs 5:6), <<*For the wise the path of life leads upwards, in order to avoid Sheol below*>> (Proverbs 15:24), and: <<*For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it*>> (Matthew 7:14); this is what the Lord makes known to his followers. To enjoy God's presence, or his face, is the fruition of the covenant: <<*He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'* And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here'>> (Exodus 33:14-15), and: <<*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace*>> (Numbers 6:24-26).

In your presence is fullness of joy. This was a joy David could experience now in the context of his previously mentioned gladness and rejoicing, but also ultimately receive when in the more immediate presence of God. Peter also quoted these lines in his message on the Day of Pentecost. They show that instead of being punished for his glorious work on the Cross, Jesus was rewarded, as prophetically described in the Psalm.

In your right hand are pleasures for evermore. David had full confidence that his life with God, both now and forevermore, would be marked by the highest and best pleasures. This is life lived above shallow entertainments and excitements. The word pleasures is related to 'pleasant places' (v.6); the pleasure that he has begun in this life will continue into its fullness in the world to come.