

## Commentary on Psalm 16

### Jerome Biblical Commentary

**33 Ps 16.** A Ps of trust. Structure: 2-6, a meditation on his relationship to Yahweh and his separation from idolators; 7-11, trust in Yahweh who saves him from death. **1.** *refuge:* Perhaps in the Temple (Ps 61:5). **2.** Yahweh as the supreme “good” is an operative idea in the development of the OT concept of immortality. **3-4.** Text uncertain; the CCD expresses the psalmist’s affection for the “holy ones” (elsewhere almost always used of members of the heavenly court) among the people, and his aversion to idolatry. **5-6.** The terms, “portion...inheritance,” are reminiscent of the partition of Palestine under Joshua (Jos 14:1ff.), and the inheritance allotted to Levites (Nm 18:20). A Levite might be the author, but the metaphors are “spiritualized” here as Von Rad (*op. cit.*, 241-43) has pointed out. They bespeak a deep sense of presence and communion (8-9) with God, which prevails over death (10). **10.** Does this verse refer to deliverance from impending or sudden death and restoration to the divine companionship in this life, or to deliverance from “corruption” after death, i.e. immortality? Scholars are divided in opinion. The word “corruption” translates Hebr *šā at* as the LXX did (*diaphthora*), but it could be rendered simply “pit,” a synonym for the nether world. It seems best to respect, with A. Weiser, the author’s vagueness, and to understand his words as indicating a conquest of death without any further specification. The NT applies 8-11 in a fuller sense to Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:25-31; 13:34-37). The apostles naturally rallied to the LXX version of *šā at*, a meaning that the word seems to have in the Qumran scrolls (cf. R. E. Murphy in *Bib* 39 [1958] 61-68). **11.** *path to life:* Correct moral conduct is the meaning of the phrase in the wisdom literature (cf. Prv 2:19; 15:24; 5:6; 6:23; the

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OT Old Testament

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

ff. and the following verses

Hebr Hebrew

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

NT New Testament

Bib *Biblica*

Egyptian parallels are discussed by B. Couroyer in *RB* 56 [1949] 412-32). The evaluation of God's "presence" is noteworthy.

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## Haydock's Catholic Commentary

### Notes & Commentary:

**Ver. 1.** *The inscription of a title.* That is, a pillar or monument, *Greek: stelographia:* which is as much as to say, that this psalm is most worthy to be engraved on an everlasting monument. (Challoner) --- *Mictam.* Protestants, "Michtam." Marginal note, or "golden *psalm* of David," or most excellent. St. Jerome, &c., have divided the word into two: "of the humble and upright David." (Haydock) --- It may signify "inscribed." (Calmet) --- But there seems to be no reason for abandoning the Septuagint, who were well acquainted with the original. The psalm is in the form of a prayer, which David pronounces in the person of Christ, to whom the apostles apply several verses; and, as the rest seem to be of the same nature, we must understand all of the Messiah, praying, in his sacred humanity, (Berthier) that his body may remain incorrupt. It may refer to Ezechias, to the captives, or rather to David, persecuted by Saul, and provoked to serve false gods, 1 Kings xxvi. 19. But then many expressions must be explained figuratively, (Calmet) and this would tend to weaken the prediction, (Berthier) which all the Fathers have understood of Christ suffering. (Calmet) --- The thing most worthy to be noted, (*stilographia*) by the prophet *David*, is our Saviour's crucifixion; (Worthington) the memory of which must be perpetuated. Job (xix. 24.) wished that what he said about the resurrection, might thus be engraven on flint. (Haydock) --- *Preserve.* David acknowledges his infirmity, and that all good comes from God. (Calmet) --- Jesus was heard praying with tears, &c., Hebrews v. 7. In his humanity, He might use these expressions, (Haydock) as He was the head of a new people, whom he wished to sanctify and instruct. (Berthier) --- He often prayed, as the gospel informs us. (Worthington)

**Ver. 2.** *I have.* Hebrew, "Thou, *my soul*, hast said." But St. Jerome agrees with us. --- *Goods.* Hebrew, "my good is not above thee." I can desire nothing greater. (Berthier) --- Aquila and Vatable seem to have the same idea as the Septuagint. We reap all the profit from our piety. (Calmet) --- The redemption was entirely for man's benefit, (Worthington) though it gave the greatest glory to God. (Haydock) --- Since God, therefore, wants nothing, I will shew my kindness (Bellarmine) to the poor. (Haydock)

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*RB Revue biblique*

<sup>1</sup>Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

**Ver. 3. Saints.** Hebrew, "the magnificent" priests, God himself, (Exodus xv. 11.; Calmet) and ceremonies of religion, (Haydock) for which David had a wonderful affection. (Calmet) --- But Christ has displayed the greatest love towards all his converts, and they had need of it. (Berthier) --- God here speaks, shewing that Christ should make known his wonderful charity to the apostles and other saints.

**Ver. 4. Haste.** Men who are convinced of their own infirmities, hasten to find a remedy. (Worthington) --- No sooner had fallen man been redeemed, that he strove to advance in the ways of perfection. (Berthier) --- The sins, to which the saints sometimes yield, tend to make them more cautious (Calmet) and grateful to their deliverer, like St. Peter. Persecutions likewise cause them to cling closer to God, and fill them with interior joy, Acts v. 41. (Haydock) --- If we explain it of the wicked, chastisement often makes them repent, Psalm lxxvii. 34. (Calmet) --- "Their idols have been multiplied after their followers, I will not join in their libations of blood." (St. Jerome) --- David was continually exposed to such temptations, among the idolaters; but out of contempt, he would not even pronounce the name of the idols. (Calmet) --- *Blood*, or bloody. (Du Hamel) --- The pagan (Worthington) and Mosaic sacrifices shall cease. Christ will unite us (Berthier) by a more excellent oblation of his own body and blood. (Haydock) --- Christians shall be distinguished by a fresh appellation, being styled children of light and of God, in opposition to the sons of men, (St. Augustine, &c.; Calmet) and pagans.

**Ver. 5. Cup.** Eternal happiness consists in seeing (Worthington) and enjoying God, (Haydock) and is promised to the patient. Though Christ was truly king of Israel and exercised jurisdiction, (John xii., and xviii. 37., and Matthew xxi., &c.; Worthington) yet it was not of a temporal nature; (Haydock) and his chief inheritance was the Lord, who would reward his merits. He has taught all clergymen to make this happy choice; as they declare when they become such. Man may call God *his* inheritance, as he was made for him; and though he may have fallen, if he rise again, his title will be restored, and he may obtain felicity, whether he live in the world or retire from it. (Worthington) --- David alludes to the custom of allotting each his portion of wine and meat, which was greater in proportion to the person's dignity. He rejects with disdain all worldly and sensual joys. (Calmet) --- God is not "a part," but the whole *portion* of a good man. --- *It is*, &c. St. Jerome, "Thou art the possessor of my lot." I trust in thee for all. (Haydock) (1 Peter i. 4., and 2 Timothy i. 12.) In the ancient sacrifices a part was reserved for the offerer. But Jesus keeps nothing back.

**Ver. 6. Lines**, with which land was measured. (Berthier) --- Christ expresses his satisfaction with his church, which is gathered from all nations, to manifest the choicest virtues, Titus ii. 14. (Euthymius, St. Jerome, &c.) (Calmet) --- This was his inheritance, not measured out with lines, (Josue x.) but reaching to the very ends of the earth, Psalm ii. (Haydock)

**Ver. 7. Understanding.** Hebrew, "counsel." In the *night* of tribulation God directs the *reins*, or affections of the soul. Christ might speak thus concerning his human nature. (Berthier) (Luke ii. 40., and Hebrews v. 7.) David also gives thanks to God for enabling

him to make so happy a choice, and to avoid being seduced. (Calmet) --- He derives instructions from pain. (Worthington)

**Ver. 8. *That I.*** Hebrew, "I shall not," &c. The sense is the same, but St. Peter agrees with us and the Septuagint, Acts ii. 25, &c. It is not of faith that the seven preceding verse regard Jesus Christ as the following do; but as the same person speaks, we may rationally infer that all should be explained of him. Though he always enjoyed the beatific vision, his soul had the affections of other men, and always tended to keep in God's presence. So the angels who see God, *desire* more and more to contemplate him, 1 Peter i. 12. How earnestly ought we to strive always to keep in the divine presence! (Berthier) then we should constantly advance in virtue, and fear no dangers. The patriarchs thus *walked with God*, and arrived at such perfection. (Haydock) --- The Father was always at the right hand of his Son, to support and glorify him; and the Son, having continually performed what was pleasing to God, (John viii. 29.) was placed at his right hand at his ascension, though his divinity had never been separated from him. (Calmet) --- He had always God in view, and has left us a pattern how to behave. (Worthington)

**Ver. 9. *Tongue.*** Hebrew, "glory." Yet Protestants translate, "tongue," (Acts ii.) as St. Peter follows the Septuagint (Haydock) and he surely understood the force of the Hebrew; so that his testimony in their favour is very strong. Commentators observe that the tongue manifests the joy of the heart, (Berthier) and the same word is used for the *soul*, Psalm vii. 6. (Calmet) --- Yet very different words signify the *tongue* and *glory*; and we follow the text, adopted by the apostle. Joy naturally flows from the presence of the best of friends. (Berthier) --- Our Saviour sometimes suspended this joy, that he might suffer the more for us. (Calmet)

**Ver. 10. *Soul in hell.*** Beza, (in his 1st edition, which he corrected afterwards) would translate "more corpse (*cadaver*, or carcass) in the grave;" for which he has been justly blamed. For, though the corpse is sometimes called soul, as it has been animated by it, (Haydock) and the soul and blood are often used synonymously, yet we shall find no instance of the body of any one still living being styled a soul. When speaking, therefore, of a person's future death, the *soul* means either life or the spiritual substance, Genesis xxxvii. 22., and Psalm xlix. 16. Hence the explanation of the Fathers, who understand this of Christ's descent into hell, to free the saints who were detained in limbo, is more probable. (Berthier) --- The instances which are adduced to maintain the opposite sentiment, which Calmet, &c., assert is more literal, either prove nothing, or they relate to people deceased, whose bodies were not to be touched. See Genesis ix. 5., Leviticus xvii. 11., and xxi. 11., Numbers vi. 6., and xix. 13., and Aggeus ii. 14. Christ speaks of his body in the following part of the verse, (Haydock) calling it *Holy*, because it was never separated from the divine nature. (Berthier) --- The erroneous interpretations or corruptions of Beza and Calvin on this head, opposing themselves to the consent of all the ancient Fathers, who believed this passage related of the descent into limbo, are noted, Genesis xxvii., Acts ii., and 1 Peter iii. The Protestant editions vary. Some retain the word hell, others the grave; remarking that "this is chiefly meant of Christ, by whose resurrection all his members have immortality."

And (Acts ii.) they paraphrase, "Thou shalt not leave **me** in the grave;" wresting that which regards the body, rising from the grave, to the soul, which was never there. (Worthington) --- The last edition of [King] James I agrees however with us, in both places. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption." It is observable that in the Hebrew editions, (except Stephen's and some few others) we find the word *chasic* in the text, though the last *i* be properly omitted in the margin; as the word would otherwise signify "saints:" and thus make the apostles false witnesses, Acts xiii. 35, &c. (Haydock) --- "But who shall lay any such thing to their charge? Other men may be deficient in their knowledge, and in their honesty; but inspired apostles could neither be deceived nor deceive. All the ancient versions, the Masorets," who order the word to be read in the singular, though printed plural in the text, and many of the best manuscripts vouch for their veracity. Moreover it is not true that God will not suffer his *saints* to see corruption; and, if this were the meaning of the words, they would not predict the resurrection of any particular person: yet "these words, the apostles observe to the Jews, are a prophecy of some particular person, whose *soul* was not long to continue in the place of departed spirits, and whose *body* was not to be corrupted, *both* being soon to be reunited. Now David, say they, did not speak this of *himself*, &c. Have the apostles imposed a prophecy upon the Jewish people, and upon the world?" (Kennicott, Dis. i.) --- This learned author was greatly encouraged to go on with his ten years' labour, in examining Hebrew manuscripts over the world, by finding many of the so favourable to the Christian religion, though it had been confidently asserted that all the manuscripts were perfectly uniform. We may rejoice to see that he also approves of the Catholic explanation of this passage, and does not refer the whole to the burial of Christ. In effect, the Apostles' Creed clearly distinguishes this article from that of the descent into hell. --- *One*. Montfaucon ventures to follow Keri, "thy merciful one." (Haydock) --- *Corruption*. "Neither wilt thou permit that sanctified body, by which other people are to be sanctified, to become corrupt." (St. Augustine) --- Christ rose again before the holy women had embalmed his body, (Luke xxvi. 53., and Mark xvi. 1.) that no one might attribute the incorruption to that cause. His appearance was so glorious, as to dispel every doubt from the minds of those who would attend to reason. His descent into hell was not in consequence of any weakness, or that he might suffer, (Calmet) as Calvin blasphemously asserts, (Haydock; Tirinus) but he descended in triumph, to liberate the souls of the holy Fathers, (Calmet) or to announce to them the glad tidings of peace, the fruits of which they should shortly enjoy at his ascension, when he would open the gates of heaven to all the faithful. (Haydock)

**Ver. 11.** *Of life*. The observance of the commandments, (St. Jerome) or the method of obtaining happiness by patience and humility. (St. Augustine) --- Thou hast opened a new track to me (Haydock) in the resurrection, unknown to mortals. (Euthymius; Bellarmine) --- For though some had been already raised to life, Christ is still called the *first-fruits of those who sleep*, or of the dead; because none had raised themselves to life, as he did. (Haydock) (John x. 18.) --- Yet he attributes all the glory to the Father, either because he is the origin of the Deity, or because Jesus considered himself as man, and was in all things obedient to his Father. (Berthier) --- His sacred humanity was now glorified, and beheld the face of God in a more perfect manner than any mere creature can do, tasting inexplicable delights for ever. (Calmet) --- We must die and rise

again, (Worthington) before we shall perfectly comprehend *the ways of life*. Then we shall form a true judgment of all terrestrial things. (Haydock)

**Bible Text & Cross-references:**

*Christ's future victory and triumph over the world and death.*

1 The inscription of a title to David himself.

Preserve me, O Lord, for I have put trust in thee. 2 I have said to the Lord, thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods.

3 To the saints, who are in his land, he hath made wonderful all my desires in them.

4 Their infirmities were multiplied: afterwards they made haste.

I will not gather together their meetings for blood-*offerings*: nor will I be mindful of their names by my lips.

5 The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me.

6 The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places: for my inheritance is goodly to me.

7 I will bless the Lord, who hath given me understanding: moreover, my reins also have corrected me even till night.

8 \*I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved.

9 Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced: moreover, my flesh also shall rest in hope.

10 \*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt thou then give thy holy one to see corruption.

11 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life, thou shalt fill me with joy with thy countenance: at thy right hand are delights even to the end.

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8: Acts ii. 25.

10: Acts ii. 31. and xiii. 35.

## Word Biblical Commentary (non-Catholic)

*Introduction* (16:1). The opening prayer for protection could refer to a special crisis, from which the psalmist seeks deliverance, or it may simply express the desire for continuing divine protection in the future, as it had already been experienced in the recent past. Taking the psalm as a whole, there were two dangers from which protection was sought: first, the danger of death (Sheol, the Pit, v 10), from which the psalmist might recently have been delivered, and second, the dangerous temptation to succumb to a syncretistic faith, such as is expressed in the words of an acquaintance (vv 2–4), which the psalmist still hears ringing in his ears.

*The words of an acquaintance* (16:2–4a). (The translation of this section is so problematical—see the *Notes*—that the *Comment* is deliberately kept short, lest too much should be built on too fragile a foundation.)

The psalmist recalls the words of an acquaintance (or a typical fellow citizen of his time), which in one sense represent temptation and in another sense represent something abhorrent to the psalmist. The acquaintance is a syncretist, wanting the best of two worlds: he vocalizes the appropriate words to God—“You are my master!”—but his faith has an elastic quality, so that he can also trip off his tongue the appropriate words to the foreign deities (the “holy ones”)—“they are my mighty ones!” The acquaintance represents temptation, for he appears to have double protection in a time of crisis; he represents something to be abhorred, for his words are clearly in contravention of the first commandment.

The word “they” (v 4) now includes all such persons (introduced as *you* in v 2): though their double indemnity approach to life was attractive, it would culminate in pain, for another god (in addition to the Lord) had been acquired. Having now dispensed with temptation, by seeing it for what it really is (v 4a), the psalmist is able to move on to his own affirmation of integrity and confidence.

*A song of confidence* (16:4b–11). In vv 4b–5, the psalmist contrasts his own position with that of the acquaintance. While the acquaintance sought to serve two masters, the psalmist renounces one and affirms the other in closely parallel language. He refuses to participate in the worship of false gods or take their names upon his lips, as his acquaintance had done (v 3). God was his “portion” and “cup”; only the lips that abstained from pronouncing the names of foreign deities could drink of the cup of

blessing provided by God. (See also Hos 2:17 [Heb. 2:19]: “I will remove the names of the *Baals* from her mouth and no more shall they be mentioned by name.”)

In vv 6–7, the psalmist reflects upon his experience of life, and that reflection issues forth in praise. His life has been a good one. He describes it in the metaphor of the allocation of “promised land,” saying that he had been awarded “pleasant places” (viz. the measuring lines have marked out for him a good location in the promised land which is life) and a “beautiful heritage.” But it is not of the literal possession of land that he speaks; it is the divine “counsel” (v 7a) which has led him to so bountiful an experience of life and which makes him bless God. The general reflection on the goodness of life returns to the particular crisis, either threatening or recently experienced, in vv 8–9; the crisis appears to take the form of the threat of death, as is implied by the words, “I shall not be shaken” (viz. I shall not die: see also Ps 13:5 and the *Comment*). The psalmist’s confidence in the face of mortal threat is based first upon the fact that the Lord is in front of him (v 8), indicating both God’s protective presence and also the psalmist’s obedience to the divine law (cf. Ps 119:30), and second upon the fact that the Lord is his “right hand” (v 8b), holding him firmly through the tremors that seek to shake him into death. With such confidence, the psalmist rejoices and exults.

In the concluding portion of the psalm (vv 9c–11), the psalmist expresses assurance both that he was delivered from the immediate threat of death and that he was restored to a full life in God’s presence. With respect to the initial meaning of the psalm, it is probable that this concluding section should not be interpreted either messianically or in terms of individual eschatology; on the later Christian interpretation along these lines, see the *Explanation* (below). The acute concern of the psalmist was an immediate crisis and an immediate deliverance. His body had been endangered and his life threatened with untimely termination in *Sheol*: on Sheol see the discussion at Ps 6:5 (*Comment*). The word *Pit* is poetically synonymous to Sheol. But emerging confidently from that crisis of mortality, the psalmist acknowledges that God makes him know, or experience, the “path of life,” 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.

### ***Explanation***

I have suggested in the *Comment* that the psalm, with respect to its initial meaning, is neither messianic nor eschatological in nature. Yet it is apparent that in the earliest Christian community, the psalm was given a messianic interpretation with respect to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:25–28), and Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:35), reflect this interpretation of the psalm in their preaching. From one perspective, this change in meaning attributed to the text may be examined in the context of the history of interpretation: see Schmitt,

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Heb. Hebrew

cf. *confer*, compare

*BZ* 17 (1973) 222–48; Boers, *ZNW* 60 (1969) 105–10. From another perspective, it is an example of the double meanings which may be inherent in the text of Scripture, a dimension of their inspiration, as expressed with such clarity by C. S. Lewis (*Reflections on the Psalms*, 92–100). From either perspective, the new meaning imparted to the text suggests not only progress, but contrast. The psalmist was faced with imminent death; he rose in confidence above that danger to know the fullness of life in God’s presence. But in the new interpretation, Jesus not only faces imminent death—he goes on to die; whereas from the psalmist’s theological perspective, death would end it all, in the experience of Jesus, death became a door. The psalmist rose up in confidence against the danger of death: Jesus rose up in confidence from the actual stronghold of death. While God did not abandon the psalmist to Sheol, he delivered Jesus from Sheol.

And the progression of meaning in the history of the psalm’s interpretation also suggests for us a progression in our experience of living. While with the psalmist we may seek deliverance from an untimely death and may rise confidently above that danger, eventually a timely death will come, as it does to all mankind. Yet there is a new ground for confidence for all mankind, for the untimely death of Jesus was consummated in resurrection; that resurrection offers hope to all who read the sermons of Peter and Paul, whether their deaths be timely or untimely. The psalmist wrote from a particular experience, and yet his words touched upon the experience of all mortal beings, namely the fear of death. It is a fear which must be controlled confidently if life is to be lived fully, yet it is a fear which can never be controlled absolutely. Yet its sting is removed in the new meaning of Ps 16: the terminal threat of Sheol was conquered in the resurrection of Jesus.

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## Daily Bible Study Series (non-Catholic)

*A Miktam of David.*

<sup>1</sup>Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge.

<sup>2</sup>I say to the Lord, “Thou art my Lord;

I have no good apart from thee.”

<sup>3</sup>As for the saints in the land, they are the noble,

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*BZ Biblische Zeitschrift*

*ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

<sup>2</sup>Craigie, P. C. 2002. *Vol. 19: Word Biblical Commentary : Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas

in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup>Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;

their libations of blood I will not pour out

or take their names upon my lips.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;

thou holdest my lot.

<sup>6</sup>The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

yea, I have a goodly heritage.

The word *Miktam* found in the heading of this psalm has long remained a mystery. The Greek for it, as found in the LXX's heading of the psalm, reads "stone inscription". No one could think what that meant until recently. For the word has appeared in the Ugaritic language (a cousin of Hebrew, deciphered only about 1930), and there also it seems to mean "inscription on a stone slab". I am only going to make a very tentative suggestion from this. Off and on for a century now the suggestion has been made that this psalm was composed by a convert from one of the Canaanite peoples. This would include those persons who spoke the Ugaritic language. Does our heading thus suggest that this convert from outside the covenant people has found in Israel's faith in Yahweh, the Lord, what he had long hoped to be true, that God is indeed that Rock which Israel said he was (Ps. 18:2, etc.)?

This foreigner finds the experience to be one of *taking refuge* as does the writer of Ps. 18:2. Till now he has known God as *el*, the Ugaritic name for the supreme Being that appears in our psalm at verse 1, and which is translated "God". His words remind us of those Greeks, foreigners, who said to Philip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). We may actually legitimately read verses 2 and 3 as "I said to Yahweh. You are to be my Lord; my whole good depends on You".

I have found, he continues, that the covenant people have received me warmly, so that I now delight in my new friendships. They have behaved to me as only nobles, aristocrats, would. He refers of course, by the word *saints*, to the people of the covenant now in their own *land*, that God had promised to them before they arrived (Exod. 19:6).

As is shown in the RSV *ftn.* the text of the next verse is not clear. But what our writer seems to be saying is that usually when people change their religion they seldom find

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LXX The Septuagint or Greek Version of the OT.

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

themselves completely at home inside the new cult. If he had joined with a Canaanite cult, he would have said, "I will not use the names of their gods." If our friend had chosen the god Moloch of the Canaanites, for example, he would have had to sacrifice one of his babies to that god (Lev. 20:2). If he had gone to live in Carthage, and had adopted its religion, he would have had to participate in human sacrifice. Obviously he shrank in horror from the very idea of both such practices.

But, he goes on to say, I have deliberately and in complete freedom of choice, chosen *Yahweh* as my *portion*, and found him to be all that I could long for. The phrase *chosen portion* comes from the time when the land of Israel was being allotted amongst the twelve tribes of Israel. Each tribe then received his portion. His *cup* is just another way of saying the same thing. Obviously he can't help repeating himself with joy. Then he says it a third time! For one's *lot* is the same thing as one's portion. Furthermore, he adds, when they measured out for me with their dividing lines (see Mic. 2:5), so to speak, that which was to be my share in Israel's heritage, I found I had been granted a splendid dower. Once again, he can't help but say this also a second time. "Indeed it was an inheritance that is beautiful to me."

Theologically speaking, this confession is of deep import. There are those who take for granted that ancient Israel thought of their God as being meant for them only. Foreigners could have what gods they wanted. So this leads such people to declare that Israel had little or no feeling for mission. But this psalm is just one passage amongst many that give the lie to such a view. And it gives the lie too to those who today tell the Church in a loud voice that they should leave the heathen alone. They should not disturb them in their inherited faiths, whatever these might be, for they suit those peoples better than Christianity ever would.

## THE JOY OF THE NEW CONVERT

Psalm 16:7–11

<sup>7</sup>I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.

<sup>8</sup>I keep the Lord always before me;

because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;

my body also dwells secure.

<sup>10</sup>For thou dost not give me up to Sheol,

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ftn. Footnote to a verse in the RSV.

or let thy godly one see the Pit.

<sup>11</sup>Thou does show me the path of life;

in thy presence there is fullness of joy,

in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Our friend is clearly enthusiastic about his new-found faith. He is grateful to *el* (see verse 1) for guiding his thoughts and for leading him to convert to this God whom he has now found to be *Yahweh*. *Yahweh* has been leading him even in the night hours and motivating his kidneys to help him think theologically! The English says *heart*, the Hebrew says *kidneys*. Those organs are the most sensitive and possibly the most vital part of the human frame. The ancient world accepted as fact that all our inward parts are involved in our thinking and feeling, and that each part can stand for and work for the others. Some suggest that the kidneys were the seat of the conscience. But what is meant is that God uses the whole of his being, feeling, imagination, reason, logical thought and even his digestive system to instruct him in his new faith: "I have set the Lord right in front of me, unremittingly; (I know that) he is also alongside me, so I shall be quite unmoved."

When our friend "converted" he didn't change his God. That would not be possible, for there is only one God. *El* is the basic root of the Hebrew for "God", which is usually *elohim*. *Allah* in Arabic is, of course, from the same root. *El*, however, occurs quite commonly in the OT. We see it, for example, in the name *Immanu-el* (God with us). *Yahweh*, on the other hand, is the name by which the only God, *el*, revealed himself to Moses. The root of the name *Yahweh* is the verb *h-y-h*, *to become* (rather than the static idea of *to be*). But we must make three additions to that statement.

(1) There is movement and action in the word *h-y-h*. This is seen clearly, for example, in the first words of Hosea: "The word of the Lord that *came* [Hebrew *h-y-h*] to Hosea."

(2) This movement is from God to man, because God is the living God, and man is only creature. That is why God, by grace, always takes the initiative. God says to Moses at Exod. 3:12, "I will become [*ehyeh*] with you." So we see how at Exod. 3:14 the words I AM (also *ehyeh*) mean much more than what those capital letters in English suggest. The point is that God's name "I am who I am" is not there at all in the Hebrew. It is to be found in the LXX, even more badly translated, as "I am the existent One". That, of course, is a Greek philosophical idea, far removed from the *living* God of the OT.

(3) The name *Yahweh*, built from our root, seems to have been formed from the active, transitive form of the verb *h-y-h*. So, putting all these ideas together we believe that the divine Name may mean something like "He who causes to become with", and at

Exod. 6:3–4, he is to *become with* Moses, and through Moses, with all Israel. Exod. 3:15 adds that this God of Israel is the God of the ancient Fathers of Israel, he who had long ago made covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And it was into this ancient covenant that our foreign friend was now made welcome, to find God ever growing closer to him. Finally, through reverence, the Jewish use of the word LORD, (in capitals in the AV) was taken over by the Christian Church in place of the Hebrew *Yahweh*. The name *Jehovah*, by the way, should never be used. It was the invention of printers in the fifteenth century.

Because the Lord of the Covenant is a God who has revealed himself to be like this, and since our foreigner has found him to be so, no wonder he rejoices, the whole of him, body, soul and spirit. “Even my body rests blissfully in You.” And since this God of the Covenant has now said to him in person, “I will never let you go, my *godly one*” (meaning “he who loyally keeps covenant with me”), his promise must extend even beyond death. Sheol was the underworld of the dead, and the Pit was the “sump” down at its very bottom. But God is the living God, both now and always, so our new convert will also live for ever.

Did the later congregation join in too at this point, as in other psalms? If so, they had by now learned from this foreigner to declare with complete conviction that since *life* comes as a gift from the living God, God will certainly not take back his gift if he is to be true to himself. This means that God’s covenant people will rejoice in his love for all eternity

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AV Authorized, or King James, Version of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup>Knight, G. A. F. 2001, c1982. *Psalms : Volume 1*. The Daily study Bible series. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville