

Psalm 16:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Analysis

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. This verse stands at the psalm's theological center and provides the basis for Peter's resurrection sermon at Pentecost. Its dual meaning—David's confidence and Messianic prophecy—makes it crucial for Christian theology.

"For thou wilt not leave" (כִּי לֹא-תַּעֲזֹב/ki lo-ta'azov) uses emphatic negative: "You will not abandon, forsake, leave behind." Azav means to leave, forsake, abandon—to leave someone in a place or condition. The imperfect tense indicates future certainty: "You will not leave." This confidence grounds the previous verse's hope—flesh rests securely because God won't abandon the psalmist to death's realm.

"My soul in hell" (נֶפֶשׁ לְשָׁאָל/nafshi lish'ol) requires careful understanding. Nefesh (soul) means life, person, living being—the animating principle that makes one alive. Sheol (translated "hell" in KJV) is the Hebrew realm of the dead—not hell in the sense of eternal punishment but the grave, death's domain, the place of departed souls. The promise is that God won't abandon the psalmist permanently to death.

"Neither wilt thou suffer" (לֹא-תַּתְּתִּן/lo-titten) continues the negative: "You will not give, permit, allow." Natan means to give, permit, allow to happen. God actively prevents what follows—not passively observing but actively intervening.

"Thine Holy One" (תְּהִינָּה קָדְשָׁךְ/chasidekha) uses chasid, meaning godly one, faithful one, one characterized by chesed (covenant loyalty, steadfast love). With possessive suffix ("Thy faithful one"), this indicates someone in special covenant relationship with God—faithful to God and experiencing God's faithfulness in return. Historically this referred to David as God's anointed; prophetically it refers to Messiah as the ultimately Holy One.

"To see corruption" (לְרֹאֹת שְׁחַת/lir'ot shachat) means to see (experience) decay, destruction, the pit. Shachat refers to the decay of death—bodily decomposition. The promise is preservation from corruption—either deliverance from death or preservation through death without bodily decay.

Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:25-31) argues this verse couldn't ultimately refer to David, who died and whose body decayed. Therefore, it prophesies the Messiah. God didn't abandon Jesus's soul to Hades (Greek for Sheol), nor did His body see corruption—He rose on the third day before decay began (John 11:39 indicates decay typically started by the fourth day). Paul makes the same argument in Acts 13:34-37.

Historical Context

The concept of Sheol in Old Testament theology requires careful nuancing. Sheol is the realm of the dead—not hell (eternal punishment) nor heaven (blessed presence with God) but the grave, death's domain. Old Testament saints had less-developed afterlife theology than New Testament believers, though hope gradually emerges (Job 19:25-27, Psalm 73:23-26, Daniel 12:2).

For David, this verse likely expressed confidence that God would preserve his life through immediate threats—he wouldn't die prematurely but would live to fulfill God's purposes. Yet his words, like much prophetic Scripture, carried meaning beyond his understanding, ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

Jewish interpretation historically struggled with this verse. David obviously died and was buried; his tomb was known (Acts 2:29). Rabbinic interpretation focused on righteous people generally or future resurrection. But Peter's argument was

compelling: the text says "Thy Holy One" (singular) won't see corruption, yet David's body did decay, therefore it refers to Messiah.

Early church fathers cited this verse extensively as resurrection prophecy. Justin Martyr (150 CE) used it against Trypho to prove Christ's resurrection from Old Testament Scripture. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine—all cited Psalm 16:10 as prophesying Christ's bodily resurrection before decay.

Medieval Jewish-Christian debates often centered on this verse. Christians argued it proved Jesus is Messiah; Jewish interpreters offered alternative readings or denied Messianic interpretation. The verse remained contentious precisely because it so clearly requires resurrection without decay—something only Jesus fulfilled.

Theologically, this verse establishes that death and decay—consequences of sin (Genesis 3:19, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return")—would be defeated. Christ's resurrection broke sin's power, defeated death, and guaranteed believers' future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Because Christ didn't see corruption, neither will believers ultimately—"this corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How did Peter prove from this verse that Jesus is the Messiah, and why was his argument compelling?
2. What is the difference between Sheol (realm of the dead) and hell (eternal punishment), and why does the distinction matter?
3. How does Christ's resurrection 'without seeing corruption' guarantee believers' future resurrection?

4. In what ways did David understand this promise, and how did its fulfillment exceed his understanding?
5. What comfort does this verse provide when facing death, and how does it change death's meaning for believers?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	לֹא	תַּעֲזֹב	לֹא	לֹא
H3588	H3808	For thou wilt not leave	my soul	in hell
		H5800	H5315	H7585
תַּתִּיחַ	לֹא	וְתַּחֲזִיקָךְ	לֹא	שְׁחַתָּה
neither wilt thou suffer		thine Holy One	to see	corruption
H5414		H2623	H7200	H7845

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 49:15 (Parallel theme): But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

Revelation 1:18 (Parallel theme): I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Revelation 20:13 (Parallel theme): And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

Luke 16:23 (Parallel theme): And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Isaiah 14:9 (Parallel theme): Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

Luke 1:35 (Holy): And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Deuteronomy 32:22 (Parallel theme): For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

1 Corinthians 15:42 (Parallel theme): So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

Leviticus 19:28 (Parallel theme): Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.

Numbers 6:6 (Parallel theme): All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org