

Difficulties In The Hebrew Text Of The Old Testament

Psalm XVI, 1–4

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The King James translation offers this wording:

Michtam of David. Preserve me, O God; for in thee do I put my trust.

V.2. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

V.3. But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

V.4. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

The latest revised version has this translation:

1. Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge.

2. I say to the Lord, “Thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee.”

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

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

I would offer this as a summary of the contents of the psalm: In the face of death Christ commends soul and body to His gracious keeping whom He has confessed before God and the saints as His Lord. He refuses in any way to honor the heathen idols, who bring only sorrows, but instead awaits all good things from God. To Him He gives glory and thanks for all good things and blessings, trusts confidently and gladly in Him, is confident, too, that His body shall not see corruption but rise to perfect bliss in the presence of God to all eternity.

The door to the understanding of this remarkable Easter psalm has been left wide open by v. 10. This has been pointed out clearly by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:25–31 and Acts 13:35–37. Both the text itself and the New Testament interpretation show clearly that the speaker in the psalm is Christ Himself, for of no one else could it be said that His flesh should not see corruption. The question of the speaker having thus been settled, the meaning of the rest of the psalm also becomes clear, and we may proceed to the difficulties of verses 1–4.

V. 1. “Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.” The idea of a Christ who prays disturbs us not in the least, for it meets us again and again in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Christ prays according to His human nature as One who is actually in need of the help of the Father, faced as He is with death in its cruelest form. Compare the similar anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a cry for protection, but the whole psalm shows that it is uttered in a calm, confident, assured spirit; for it is the Son who calls to the Father, the Beloved to the Lover, the One to whom the promise has been made to the Giver of the promise. *’ēl* —God is addressed by the designation of His power and might. There is no question about this help. — *kī chāsīthī bākh*: “for I have trusted in thee.” Cf. the expressions *b’tsēl* (in the shadow), *b’tsēl kanphē p’ōni* (in the shadow of someone’s wings), *b’sether kanphē* (in the protection of the wings of someone), etc. Otherwise with simple *b’* and the person. Lit. “to seek refuge in ...” This is the true picture of the whole life of Jesus here below: He walked with God, lived with and in Him, was assured at all times of the protection of His Father. As He had never doubted this before, so He did not now. In other words, it is not doubt which here brings anguish and fear, but it is that natural dread which proves the human nature of Christ, the dread of death. Jesus shuddered at the sight of death at the grave of Lazarus, and he shuddered at the sight of death for His own sake

here. The confidence of Jesus rests on God and Him alone. Already at this point we feel the glory of this psalm for the Easter message it proclaims and the Easter spirit it breathes.

V. 2. “I have said unto the Lord, My Lord art Thou; My good is not above thee.” “Above” in the sense of “beyond.” As the former verse was a prayer, so this is a confession. As such it has a glorious content: God is His Lord, and His hope rests in Him alone. He looks to no other god; He looks to no other god for good, i.e. for the help for which he has prayed in v. 1. Here is the source of His confidence in the face of death; this is the content of His preaching and confession, in the first place, *before God*. Can it be said that He confesses and preaches this to God? Surely; for it is in this very way, first of all, that God is glorified and praised. John 1:49; 6:68, 69; 9:38; 11:27. Each prayer Jesus offered became a glorification of God, for it acknowledged His powerful existence, it was a reminder of His promises, it was a testimony of His love and faithfulness. In loving fulfillment of the First Commandment Jesus then also confesses that God is the only source of every blessing and good thing—“my good is not above thee.” This excludes every other source of good and is purposely put in the negative. In the presence of death this, of course, becomes the more significant; but this attitude on the part of Jesus is characteristic of His whole life. The words become a reminder to us to consider our profession of faith as in this same presence, for here we see more clearly how vain it is to put some trust in God, some in man, ourselves, the world and its favor or help or popularity. Jesus gives this trust and confidence in God as a reason why God should hear His prayer.

V. 3. “unto the holy ones who are in the earth and (unto) the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.”—The confession of Christ in v. 2 continues on in this verse as to the recipients of the testimony. Jesus has confessed to God, and now to the *holy ones and glorious ones*. In other words, He has confessed before God, His Father, and before the Church of true believers. By their faith in Christ these members of the Church have become holy through the forgiveness of sins and are glorious in the sight of God and men, particularly in the sight of Jesus by whom the forgiveness has been wrought and who sees them as they really are, clean, pure, holy, undefiled, saints, heirs of heaven, children of God. They are still in the earth, afflicted with the things that this earth has to offer, they are lowly in the sight of men, they are tempted and they fall into sin, they are hated and oppressed, despised and accused by their own heart; they sorrow, hunger after righteousness, and boast of nothing in themselves. But God knows them as His, Christ knows them as His, and they are holy and glorious with a holiness and glory which, though it is given them as an inheritance, still is theirs and makes them fit for heaven. It is the more real because Christ has wrought it for them and given it to them, and God has recognized its heavenly worth. Remember that it is Jesus Himself who here speaks of them as holy and glorious; and it is a Christian’s right to hold this up before God and men and before his own trembling heart, before the devil and all his hosts, as a glory and honor which shall not be taken from him, even on the day of the judging of all flesh. — Note the active, transitive significance of the *chephtsi*.

We offer this explanation and interpretation in preference to other solutions of a text that is none too simple. But it involves no change of the sacred text. The *’āmart* is to be looked upon as a defective manner of writing for *’āmarti* (first person singular), as seen from the context, the variant reading, and Ges.-Kautsch Gram. §44 i. This interpretation is in keeping with the teaching of Scripture. It seems to maintain a simple continuation of thought with the foregoing verse that spoke of testimony, confession. The order may seem unusual, but may be explained by this that the poetic form preferred this arrangement of words. Furthermore, it is natural to separate the confession before God from that offered to men, i.e. the ones to whom the confession is directed. Though the content of the confession is in both cases the same, the wording of the first is brought in the first person and the second, while the confession before men would naturally have to be changed to the third person. Finally, this arrangement makes it possible to bring the added dependent clauses in the case of the “holy ones” and the “glorious ones” where they properly belong.

V. 4. “Their sufferings shall be many (who) hasten to follow after (strange gods); I will not pour out their libations of blood and I will not take up their names upon my lips.” He, the Christ, here introduces the opposite thought, namely concerning the idols and the idol worshippers. As He has confessed His allegiance to the true God, so He here renounces the idols and their worship in every form. As He is confident of receiving all that is good from the true God, so evil and harm are to be expected from the idols, i.e. from the worship of idols.

The following two words present a difficulty recognized by the commentators. *Māhār*’ is most easily derived from the stem *māhar*, and *māhārū* then becomes a pausal form of the *qal* (apparently unused) with the same fundamental meaning as the *pi’el*. The *’achēr* is more difficult, and yet easily connected with the stem *’āchar* with the fundamental meaning of “after,” “following,” etc. It is true, the verb is used in the sense of “delaying.” However, the context speaks plainly of idols and idol worship, and we prefer to associate the form *’achēr* as the infinitive of the *pi’el* with the expression *’elōhîm ’achērîm* of the First Commandment in the sense “follow after other gods.” Thus the sentence or clause would signify: “who are eagerly following strange gods.”

Thus the first section of v. 4 presents the warning thought in contrast to “my good is not beyond thee” in this sense: “But those who follow strange gods will experience only sorrow and pain.” In contrast to the idolaters and in contrast to His attitude toward the true God, the Christ renounces altogether any allegiance to the false gods either by way of service or worship. The very names of the idols are an abomination to Him. Cf. Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:3; Josh. 23:7; Hos. 2:16–17; Is. 42:8.