

Psalm 16 (LXX Ps 15) and Acts of the Apostles – Part I

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 16 is one of the most well-known Psalm texts of the Psalter. This can be attributed, among other reasons, to the fact that the NT, specifically the Acts of the Apostles, applied this text to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The quotations from Psalm 16 in the book of Acts thus got a messianic-Christological meaning. If we, however, take a look at the text of Psalm 16, it seems that this psalm does not contain any direct messianic conceptions. Neither does it refer to the resurrection of the flesh. There are, however, features in the Greek translation (LXX) of this psalm which offered an opportunity to the New Testament authors to apply the text to Jesus – specifically to his resurrection from death. In part I this article will focus on the MT text of Psalm 16. Part II will focus on its application in Acts of the Apostles, as well as the hermeneutical background of the author(s) of the Acts.

A INTRODUCTION

Psalm 16 is one of the most well-known Psalm texts of the Psalter. The traditional translation of Psalm 16:10, which reads ‘for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption’, immediately reminds many Christians of the magnificent tenor aria in Handel’s oratorio ‘The Messiah’. The triumphant tone of Handel’s music, and the rephrasing of the verse in the past tense by his librettist Charles Jennens, combine to convey an unshakeable confidence in its messianic fulfilment (Johnston 1995:214).

It should furthermore be noticed that the NT, specifically Acts of the Apostles, applied this text in great confidence to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In both Peter’s sermon in Jerusalem during Pentecost (Acts 2:25-28),¹ as well

¹ This text reads as follows: ‘For David says concerning him [Jesus of Nazareth – AG]: ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken (25); therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope (26). For he will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption (27). You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence’ (28)’. The following verses (Acts 2:29-31) can also be referred to in this regard: ‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us today (29). Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath

as in Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:35),² this text from the Old Testament was interpreted in this manner (Van Uchelen 1986:100).

In Peter's sermon in Jerusalem during Pentecost, verses 8-11b of the LXX Psalm 15 are quoted as a theological argument with regard to Christ's resurrection. In Paul's sermon in Antioch verse 10b is used in the same manner and for the same goal (Kissane 1953:61). For the apostles, and therefore for orthodox Christianity, this Psalm was undoubtedly written by King David and it thus predicted the future Messiah who would not be left in Sheol, but would rise from the dead again (Johnston 1995:214).

This interpretation of Psalm 16 (LXX Ps 15) paved the way for a messianic-Christological interpretation of this psalm, which still is prevalent in some Christian communities today (Craigie 1983:158). Through the ages this messianic-Christological interpretation left its footprints in the church. Luther and Calvin also interpreted this psalm accordingly (Anderson 1972:145). According to the *Enchiridion Biblicum*³ no 513 (as quoted by Van der Ploeg 1973:104) a decree issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 1 July 1933 confirms that the author of Psalm 16 had witnessed about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even some modern exegetes are of the opinion that Psalm 16 is a messianic text (cf. Kaiser 1980:227-229; Wilson 1978:80).

These introductory statements immediately raise questions about the interpretation of this Psalm. How should exegetes interpret this text? Should they be guided by the interpretation of 'the Acts of the Apostles'? On what grounds did they interpret this text accordingly? Modern scholarship, however, emphatically rejects this exegesis of the psalm. To begin with, the psalmist was definitely not David. Secondly, the author(s) was (were) referring to himself (themselves), and not to some unknown future figure. And thirdly, he (they) was (were) asserting deliverance from imminent mortal danger, and not proclaiming belief in life beyond death. There are considerable differences between these interpretations, and for many scholars the NT reading reflects a Christological appropriation of the psalm that is alien to its original intent. In the following sections the MT text of Psalm 16 will be analysed. Attention will be paid to the

to him that he would put one of his descendants on this throne (30). Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption' (31)'.
² Acts 13:35 reads as follows: 'Therefore he has also said in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One experience corruption"'.
³ 'Enchiridion Biblicum' refers to the collection of all the important documents of the Church on Sacred Scripture. The first edition was published in 1927 and was only in Latin. Meanwhile translations in different languages have become available.

Gattung of this Psalm, the ‘possible’ dating of the text, as well as an exegetical analysis.⁴

B GATTUNG

For Gunkel & Begrich (1985:172), the opening plea for protection indicates that Psalm 16 belongs to the main category of the ‘psalms of the individual lament’ (‘Klagelieder des Einzelnen’). Psalm 16 is, however, ‘gattungsmäßig schwer einzuordnen’ (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993a:108; Zenger 1997:218). With this statement Erich Zenger reflects the differences in opinion which exist regarding the question of this text’s *Gattung*. Within the aim of this article it will suffice only to give a brief overview of some of the main proposals:

- a) In the most general terms, Psalm 16 may be classified as a *psalm of confidence* – but beyond such a descriptive statement, it is difficult to be more precise (Anderson 1972:140; Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:139; Craigie 1983:155; Gerstenberger 1991:91;⁵ Schmitt 1973:229; Seybold 1996:71; Weber 2001:97). This description can be linked to Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich who, in their classification of the psalms, assigned the ‘psalms of confidence’ (‘Vertrauenspsalmen’)⁶ to the broader category of the ‘psalms of the individual lament’ (Gunkel & Begrich 1985:254-255).⁷ It is, however, not certain whether the psalmist expresses confidence in the midst of a crisis, or as a result of deliverance from a crisis. Liess

⁴ Questions regarding the redaction-critical and composition-critical analysis will not be addressed in this article. The following authors have already focused extensively on this issue: Hossfeld & Zenger (1993b:166-182); Millard (1994:24-27); Miller (1994:127-142); Zenger (1997:212-224). Cf. Liess (2004:100-105) for a discussion of the ‘Literarkritik’; and Liess (2004:403-429) for a discussion of the composition-critical analysis with extensive focus on the position of Ps 16 within the group of Pss 15-24.

⁵ With regard to the *Gattung*, Gerstenberger (1991:91-92) postulates as follows: ‘Judging from the praise element alone (vv. 9-11), we might classify this psalm a thanksgiving song. The overall picture, however, is that of a SONG OF CONFIDENCE or CONFESSION OF FAITH’.

⁶ In this regard Zenger (1997:218) infers as follows: ‘Der Psalm setzt mit einer Bitte ein. Dann folgen bis zum Schluß Bekenntnisse des Vertrauens. Er wird deshalb übereinstimmend als “individuelles Vertrauenslied”, als “Vertrauenspsalm” gekennzeichnet. Er erhält von den Kommentatoren höchste theologischen Noten’.

⁷ According to Gunkel & Begrich (1985:131, 255) the individual lament consists of, among other things, the following components: invocation, lament (depiction of misery), requests, combined with expressions of confidence, arguments to motivate God’s intervention, declarations and the vows of thanksgiving and praise. Whenever the petition (or request) and the expressions of confidence (and trust) tend to overshadow the ‘lament’ (which, according to Gunkel, is the most important element of the individual lament), we have a psalm of confidence.

(2004:110), in a recent study on Psalm 16, also follows Gunkel in classifying this psalm as a 'psalm of confidence'.⁸

- b) Kraus (1972:119), however, does not agree with the fact that the 'psalms of confidence' are only to be categorised as a part of the 'individual lament' – he prefers to separate them from one another. He describes Psalm 16 as a 'song of prayer'.⁹
- c) If the aspect of petition in this text is emphasised, this psalm can be classified as a *psalm of petition*. According to Hossfeld & Zenger (1993a:108), Psalm 16 is 'ein Bittgebet eines einzelnen ..., der inmitten tiefsitzender Lebensangst an seiner fundamentalen Option für JHWH als seinem persönlichen Schutzgott festhält und von ihm das Glücken seines Lebensweges erhofft'. Zenger (1997:218-219) therefore criticises the classification of the text as merely a psalm of confidence as, in his opinion, this is too pious and idealistic. This interpretation overlooks the fact that the 'psalm of confidence' has its *Sitz im Leben* mostly in an hour of conflict, argumentation and attack. It is situated in the midst of the ambivalence of everyday life, in which hope is battling against doubt, trust against weakness and fear (Zenger 1997:219). The 'psalms of confidence' thus do not declare trust in God, but they probably are engaged in a battle to regain this trust once again.
- d) Other scholars have offered other proposals with regard to the Gattung of this text. Ridderbos (1955:125) classifies Psalm 16 as a royal psalm, given the fact that he interprets the superscription as a historical indication of the Davidic authorship. According to Van der Ploeg

⁸ Liess (2004:110) infers as follows: 'Abschließend ist noch einmal die formgeschichtliche Besonderheit von Ps 16 hervorzuheben: Ps 16 ist ein Vertrauenslied mit Klage- und Dankliedelementen, mit weisheitlicher Prägung und einem ausgeprägten bekenntnishaften Stil ... dominant ist jedoch die Vertrauensmotivik, weshalb Ps 16 als Vertrauenspsalm zu beschreiben ist. Die formgeschichtliche Nähe zu den Klage- und Dankpsalmen und die weisheitliche Prägung entsprechen der theologiegeschichtlichen Stellung des individuellen Vertrauensliedes Ps 16 zwischen den Lebens- und Todesvorstellungen der Klage- und Danklieder und denen der späteren Weisheitspsalmen (Ps 73)'.

⁹ Millard (1994:56), however, offers critique of this viewpoint: 'Indem Kraus Klage- und Danklieder einer gemeinsamen Gattung Gebetslieder zuweist, verwischt er diesen für das individuelle Befinden gewiß nicht unerheblichen Unterschied, ob der Klagende sich bereits gleichsam als gerettet sieht oder ob er wirklich gerettet ist ... Unter dem Aspekt des Zustandes vor oder nach der Rettung rückt das Vertrauenslied in die Nähe des Klageliedes. Diese beiden Literaturgattungen zusammenzufassen, ist vom Sitz im Leben daher unmöglich und aufgrund der literarischen Abgrenzungsprobleme beider Gattungen auch geboten'.

(1973:103) we encounter more than merely the element of confidence/trust in this psalm (which only occurs in verses 2, 10 and 11). The significance of this text is found primarily in the fact that the supplicant emphasises the fact that God is his ultimate benevolence.¹⁰

From the above-mentioned discussion, it seems impossible to fit the text of Psalm 16 into any of the standard *Gattungen*. The tone of the text probably suggests a derivative *Gattung*; it seems that the poet(s) combined different elements in order to create a specific effect and tone within the text (Groenewald 1994:39; Tromp 2000:115-116). The following elements within the text can be distinguished: petition, *invocation* and confidence (1); *professio fidei* (2); a polemic / repudiation (3-4); a declaration of assurance regarding the supplicant's inheritance (5-6) and his relationship to God (7-8); a song of confidence/praise (9-11).

The question that should rather be asked, is: how did this text function? What was its aim? It seems that the 'final text' serves the purpose to convince the reader(s) to follow the line of thought as being portrayed in this text. The text thus has a didactic character: this testimony of faith aims to convince the reader to trust in Yahweh as well – therefore the concluding section of the text proclaims trust in Yahweh. The text thus indicated the supplicant's affiliation with the Yahwistic community. According to Gerstenberger (1991:92) this text can be compared – in its function – with the Apostles' Creed in the Christian tradition. This type of confession apparently belongs to the time of early Judaism.

C DATING

The dating of this text has been a much debated issue as well. There are some scholars who are of the opinion that this text had its origins in the pre-exilic period (Kaiser 1980:223;¹¹ Ridderbos 1955:125;¹² Weiser 1979:172). Most exegetes, however, prefer a post-exilic dating. Gunkel (1968:51), Briggs & Briggs

¹⁰ Van der Ploeg (1973:103) infers as follows: 'Er wordt echter meer in betuigd dan vertrouwen alleen. De psalm vindt zijn betekenis in de bevestiging dat God het hoogste goed van die psalmist is; hij is met God verbonden, de dood komt niet, zijn geluk is blijvend'.

¹¹ Kaiser (1980:223) interprets the text of this psalm as words written by David in view of his future dynasty, kingdom and throne. He would have written these words under the influence of the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam 7).

¹² According to Ridderbos (1955:125) the Davidic authorship plays an important role in the argumentation employed in Acts 2:25f and 13:36. He therefore ascribes the psalm to the pen of David.

(1969:118)¹³ and Deissler (1964:69) place the psalm in the early post-exilic period, whereas Duhm (1899:46) prefers a much later dating. According to Van der Ploeg (1973:108) מִנְחָה (5a – ‘portion’) and שִׁפְרָה עָלַי (6b – ‘is beautiful to me’, cf. Dan 4:24) reflect Aramaic influences.¹⁴ He furthermore indicates the relationship between this text and the post-exilic wisdom literature (11a). He therefore prefers a dating in the post-exilic period.

A later dating seems plausible for the text of Psalm 16. Linguistic indicators are some of the main arguments on which this late dating is based (Liess 2004:111). The relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר (vv. 3, 7) is an indication of later developments in poetry. The *nota obiecti* אֵת־ (vv. 4, 7, 11) occurs rarely in older poetry, but more often in later poetry (GK §117b). The *scriptio plena* (v. 3: קְדוֹשִׁים (‘the holy ones’); v. 5: תִּוְכְּמֶיךָ (‘you shall uphold’), as well as the examples of Aramaisms, make a later dating plausible.

Beside the above-mentioned linguistic indicators, reference can be made to the wisdom terminology which permeates this whole text. To mention but the following: טוֹבָתִי (v. 2 – ‘my goodness’); the synonyms יַעַן // יִסַּר pi (v. 7 – ‘advise // teach’), הִידַע hif (v. 11 – ‘make known / teach’) combined with the typical wisdom expression אֶרֶץ חַיִּים (v. 11 – ‘the way of life’), which is characteristic of the younger Wisdom literature (Prov 1-9). A further argument that can be added to these examples is the fact that שֶׁחַת (v. 10 – ‘the Pit’) belongs to later texts (cf. Pss 7:16; 9:16; 30:10; 49:10; 94:13 and 103:4) (Spieckermann 1989:256).

It is not only the connections to the later wisdom literature which are an indication of a late dating, but also the linguistic and thematic relationship with Trito-Isaiah (Liess 2004:112). The polemic against the other ‘gods’ (‘Fremdgötterthematik’) has close connections with the description of post-exilic cultic practices in Isaiah 57:5ff; 65:11 and 66:3. This thematic relationship becomes especially clear in Isaiah 57:6.¹⁵ The rejection of the veneration of the gods (vv. 3-4) reflects a specific socio-historical period within the history of the Judean society, the post-exilic period.¹⁶ This conclusion is strengthened by the confes-

¹³ Briggs & Briggs (1969:118) date the text in the period between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah.

¹⁴ Cf. Gunkel (1968:53) and Briggs & Briggs (1996:118) who date שִׁפְרָה עָלַי in the Persian period.

¹⁵ This text reads as follows; ‘Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion (cf. Ps 16:5a); they, they, are your lot (cf. 16:5b); to them you have poured out a drink offering (cf. 16:4b), you have brought a grain offering. Shall I be appeased for these things?’

¹⁶ With regard to this period in the Judahite history, Hossfeld & Zenger (1993b:167) infers as follows: ‘Daß die Erschütterungen des Exils und die vielschichtigen Konflikte der nachexilischen Epoche, insbesondere die Sozialkonflikte des 5. und 4. Jhs.

sion of adherence both to Yahweh and the community of the Yahweh-faithful. According to Albertz (1992:560) the explicit confession of faithfulness to Yahweh, combined with the strong separation from the ‘others’, indicated as the enemy, is a strong marker of the post-exilic period.¹⁷ The supplicant confesses that he belongs to the group of the קְדוֹשִׁים (‘the holy ones’ – v. 3), and furthermore designates himself as a חָסִיד (v. 10b) (some other psalm texts name this group of people the צַדִּיקִים, the חַסִּידִים and the יְהוָה יִרְאֵי).

Finally, a comparison of the text of Psalm 16 with the text of Psalm 73 sheds more light on the question of the dating of this text – specifically with regard to the theme of death (Liess 2004:113). Psalm 16, in contrast to Psalm 73, has not yet indicated the problematic nature of the doctrine of divine retribution.¹⁸ Those people who venerate ‘other’ gods will indeed experience suffering; whereas the supplicant, on the other hand, only experiences God as the one who bestows all good upon him (16:2, contra Ps 73:1ff¹⁹). Furthermore, the contrast between ‘pious’ and ‘evil-doer’ has not been worked out as fully in

sowie die Konfrontationen mit dem Hellenismus und der Hegemonialpolitik der hellenistischen Fremdmächte vom ausgehenden 4. Jh. ab, tiefe Identitätsängst und -krisen ausgelöst haben, ist unübersehbar. Und daß die einzelnen Gruppen Israels darauf mit unterschiedlichen geschichtstheologischen, sozialetischen und kultischen ‘Idealbildern’ und politischen Imaginationen reagiert haben, ist aus der exilischen und nachexilischen Literatur Israels schon vielfach herausgearbeitet worden Daß auch die sukzessive Zusammenstellung der Einzelpsalmen zu Teilsammlungen wesentlich die Konstitution und Formation kollektiver Identität angesichts innerer und äußerer Konfliktsituationen der Exils- und Nachexilszeit zum Ziel hatte, ist u.E. bislang (zu) wenig beachtet worden’.

¹⁷ In this regard Albertz (1992:560) infers as follows: ‘Daneben büßte unter dem Druck der sozialen und religiösen Auseinandersetzungen das enge Vertrauensverhältnis zum persönlichen Gott seine Selbstverständlichkeit ein. Aus dem Sich-Bergen bei Gott in Todesnot, das keine Alternative kennt, wurde nun häufig eine bewußte Entscheidung für Jahwe, die sich von den Optionen, die die Frevler verführerisch vorlebten, abgegrenzt.’

¹⁸ Cf. in this regard Irsigler (1997:82): ‘Aus dem irrational gütigen Gott wird im Horizont eines jüngeren Gesetzesverständnisses ein rational vergeltender Gott (538). Daß sich diese Alternative nicht halten läßt, daß Ps 73 zwar von der Basis eines Glaubens an persönliche und adequate Vergeltung ausgeht, aber diese Lebenssicht auch in einer entscheidenden neuen Erkenntnis überwindet, läßt sich aus dem Argumentationsgang des Psalms begründen’. For a general discussion of the doctrine of divine retribution, cf. Groenewald 2002:657-674.

¹⁹ According to Irsigler (1997:82) ‘Ps 73,1 führt wie auch V. 10 auf eine kollektivierende Redaktion. Sie dürfte jünger sein als die elohistische Redaktion in Ps 73,1.26, die wohl noch vor dem Ende des 4. Jh. v. Chr. anzusetzen ist... Die Endgestalt von V. 1 erscheint nun als eine wichtige Voraussetzung dafür, daß Ps 73 in der Sammlung der Asaf-Psalmen, die ja alle mit Krisenbewältigung zu tun haben, dem kollektiven Klagelied aus der Exilszeit Ps 74 vorangestellt werden konnte’.

Psalm 16 as it is formulated in Psalm 73. With regard to the two themes, namely ‘death’ and the ‘hope to live’, Psalm 16 still reflects an earlier stage than Psalm 73, ‘denn die Todesgrenze wird in Ps 16 noch nicht in gleicher Weise wie in Ps 73 überschritten’ (Liess 2004:113).²⁰

With regard to relative chronology the text of Psalm 16 is thus an older text than Psalm 73, which reflects ‘theologised wisdom’²¹ of the post-exilic period and is dated in the late 5th / early 4th century.²² Based on the above mentioned linguistic, as well as the content and thematic observations, it is plausible to date Psalm 16 in the late post-exilic period (5th / 4th century) – but earlier than Psalm 73.

D PSALM 16: AN ANALYSIS²³

1 Strophe A (vv. 1-2)

The introductory verses of the psalm²⁴ contain the words of an imagined dialogue between the supplicant – a true worshipper of Yahweh – and some other person(s). It seems that the other person(s) was/were involved in some kind of syncretistic worship (cf. vv. 3-4). The opening prayer for protection may simply express the desire for continued divine protection in the future – as it has already been experienced in the past (Craigie 1983:156). Taking the text of this psalm as a whole, there were two dangers from which protection was sought: firstly, the danger of death (Sheol, the Pit – v. 10), and secondly, the dangerous

²⁰ Cf. also Zenger (1997:215): ‘Der Psalm ist ... so sehr von der belebenden Erfahrung der Gottesgegenwart durchdrungen, daß er zu Formulierungen vorstößt, die JHWH als Quelle des Lebens auch über den Tod des einzelnen hinaus aufscheinen lassen. Zwar bittet der Psalm zunächst ‘nur’ darum, von der Macht des Todes nicht ‘vorzeitig’ bzw. ‘unzeitig’ zerstört zu werden. Aber er erbittet dies als Schutz JHWHs: Wo ER ist, ist der Tod keine Macht, die das Leben vernichten kann. Wer in der Gottesgemeinschaft lebt, lebt in ‘Sicherheit’. Mit diesem Bekenntnis ist das Tor zur unzerstörbaren Lebensgemeinschaft mit Gott, d.h. zu einem ‘ewigen’ Leben, aufgestoßen’. More attention will be paid to this last statement in Part II of this article.

²¹ Cf. Albertz (1992:561): ‘Daß die ‘theologisierte Weisheit’ eine Spätstufe der israelitischen Weisheitstradition darstellt, ist in der Forschung weithin anerkannt; auch daß sie einer gebildeten Oberschicht zugerechnet werden muß, wird inzwischen von vielen Exegeten vertreten’.

²² Cf. Irsigler 1984:371. Cf. also Irsigler (1997:92): ‘Durch seinen Psalm ermutigt, tröstet und belehrt eine ‘Spirituale’, wohl ein weisheitlich gebildeter Levit am zweiten Jerusalemer Tempel (wahrscheinlich im 4. Jh. v. Chr.) gefährdete Mitglieder der Gottesgemeinde in einer bekenntnisgottesdienstlichen Versammlung’.

²³ Cf. Groenewald (1994:20-24) for a detailed discussion of the relevant text-critical matters. It will therefore not be discussed within the scope of this present article.

²⁴ Ps 16:1-2: ‘Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge [1]. I say to the Lord: “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you [2]”’ (NRSV).

temptation to succumb to syncretistic worship – as is expressed in the words of fellow Judahites.

In strophe A the author of this text defines his relationship to Yahweh. In cola 1bc the supplicant prays for continued protection and expresses his trust in God to keep him safe (Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:13). In this short prayer (consisting of a command + justification) he thus straightforwardly puts it that God should protect him, given the fact that he takes his refuge in him. He furthermore states it clearly that he has no good in life apart from Yahweh. The real significance of ‘say’ (אמר) in this context is not merely to introduce the words that are spoken by the supplicant, but rather to introduce his ‘confession of faith’. Verse 2 can thus be defined as his *professio fidei*.

According to Van Uchelen (1986:101) the two verbs in verse 1, namely ‘protect me’ (1b – שמר) and ‘I take refuge’ (1c – חסה), normally function in a stereotypical context: they occur in a context which refers to a situation in which the supplicant should be protected ‘from’ the hands and traps of the enemies (Pss 140:5; 141:9), and a situation in which the supplicant takes refuge in God against the hands and traps of the enemies (Pss 7:2; 141:8). In the context of this psalm they acquire a unique meaning: the supplicant asks God to protect him from following the other gods (v. 4a), and also to protect him from ‘Sheol’ and the ‘pit’ (v. 10) (Craigie 1983:156).

He confesses his faith: Yahweh is the Lord of his life. Therefore he will not be separated (8b) from the ‘way of life’ Yahweh has made known to him (11a). He is dependent on God for his welfare, and he receives the good things in life from Him.²⁵

2 Strophe B (vv. 3-4)

In contrast to strophe A, in which Yahweh forms the focal point, the focus has now shifted to the ‘others’ and it seems that the supplicant is engaged in a controversy with them. These verses contain the words of an imagined (or former) dialogue between the psalmist, who has just identified himself as a true worshipper of Yahweh (vv. 1-2), and some other person(s).

In these two verses the poet accentuates that he will not engage in any syncretistic worship services. According to him those who practice syncretism, will only multiply their pains (3) (Van der Ploeg 1973:107). By means of two parallel sentences the poet makes it clear that he will neither participate in the worship of other gods, nor take their names on his lips (4). He does not even

²⁵ According to Hossfeld & Zenger (1993a:111) ‘für den Beter ist seine Beziehung zu JHWH die Summe aller Lebensgenüsse’. Cf. also Weber (2001:97): ‘... mit Aussagen über (irdisches) Glück und Lebensfreude. Für den Beter ist solches verankert in JHWH selber, der sein Ein-und-Alles ist’.

want to call their names; not to mention taking part in their cultic activities. This is a direct implication of his commitment to Yahweh (1-2). He hereby also wants to encourage fellow people to do the same (Beuken 1980:378).

Uncertainty exists with regard to the identity of the *קְדוּשִׁים וְאַדִּירִי* ('the holy ones and the mighty ones' – 3). Van Uchelen (1986:102, 104) interprets these two terms as 'gods' and thus not as human beings. Parker (1995:1357) also follows this line of interpretation and states as follows: 'In Ps 16:3 "the holy ones who are in the land" is parallel to "the noble ones": both probably referring to gods rather than people; but the context is difficult'.²⁶ According to this interpretation, the psalmist states that he had followed the gods, before turning to Yahweh. However, this seems to be a problematic interpretation.²⁷

According to Beuken (1980:373, 377-379) *קְדוּשִׁים וְאַדִּירִי* ('the holy ones and the mighty ones' – 3) denote fellow country-men, that is fellow Judahites. *אַחֵר* ('another') in verse 4a refers to gods. The most important reasons are the following:

- a) This meaning is not foreign to the OT at all (e.g. Lev 19:2; Num 16:3; Deut 33:3; Isa 4:3; Ps 34:10; 2 Chron 35:3). It seems that the stem *קדש* can refer to either heavenly beings or human beings. Both the Hebrew Bible and other Semitic languages attest to this. This interpretation thus has a long tradition history.
- b) In the expression *קָדְרוּ אַחֵר* ('they have obtained another') the word *אַחֵר* ('another') belongs to a certain semantic field: even without further addition, it can refer to 'other gods'. It thus refers to something new in the text, which has not been mentioned before.

In conclusion: the poet thus addresses his fellow Judahites who have become unfaithful and who have engaged in syncretistic service to other gods. He states categorically that he does not want to take part in the veneration of the 'other gods' (4bc). Although their double indemnity approach to life was attractive, it would culminate in pain.

In these verses the supplicant states categorically that he belongs to the 'community of the faithful'. This confession simultaneously implies the rejection of the 'other gods'. It comes as no surprise that the positive confession of verse 1-2 is followed by a rejection of the veneration of foreign gods in cola 4bc. Colon 4a thus functions as a hinge verse: it contrasts the fate of the faithful supplicant to the fate of the followers of 'other gods'. In verses 1-4 the suppli-

²⁶ For this line of argumentation, compare also Craigie 1983:155; Dahood 1965:87; Seybold 1996:71; Zenger 1997:224.

²⁷ Cf. also Liess (2004:115-154) for an extensive critique of the above-mentioned interpretation.

cant formulates the focus of his life in a threefold manner: his relationship towards Yahweh, his relationship with the community of Yahweh-faithful, and his relationship to other gods (and those who venerate them).

3 Strophe C (vv. 5-6)

In this strophe the psalmist describes his relationship to Yahweh in more detail and contrasts his position to that of some fellow Judahites. While they seem to serve two masters, the supplicant renounces one and affirms the other in closely parallel language (Craigie 1983:157). He describes Yahweh as ‘my portion’ (חֶלְקִי) and ‘my cup’ (כּוֹסִי) (5a). They are expressions of deep confidence.

In verses 5b-6ab this relationship with Yahweh is described in the terminology of the allocation of the ‘promised land’, saying that Yahweh was the one who held his lot (גּוֹרְלִי – 5b), he was awarded a beautiful ‘heritage’ (נַחֲלָה – 6b) and ‘pleasant places’ (נְעִימִים – 6a), that is to say the ‘measuring lines’ (חֲבָלִים – 6a) marked out for him a good location in the ‘promised land’ (that is life). The measuring lines were used in measuring off a plot of ground, or field. This terminology, which is typical of the promise and the conquest of the land, occurs in Joshua 13:23; 14:4; 15:13; 17:5; Numbers 16:55; 18:21; and Deuteronomy 4:21.

What does it mean when the supplicant proclaims his trust in Yahweh in terms borrowed from the ancient traditions of the occupation of the land? It seems that the supplicant is not speaking of a plot of land, or a field; he uses the word metaphorically, meaning everything that Yahweh has done for him, everything that Yahweh has given him.²⁸ The context indeed indicates a deeper level of meaning. This metaphor concretises the relationship which exists between Yahweh and the psalmist (Kraus 1986:160).²⁹

According to the Old Testament the land is regarded as one of the central blessings of salvation (Kaiser 1993:162f; Küng 2001:75; Von Rad

²⁸ Cf. Hossfeld (1993:29): ‘Entscheidend ist die Theologisierung der Landzuteilung. JHWH ist der Lebensraum bzw. der Erbanteil und das Ackerland, das JHWH selbst dem Beter zugewiesen hat. Die Landmetaphorik steht hier im Dienste der Beschreibung einer Beziehung zu Gott, die in ihrer Qualität und Dauer über den Tod hinaus nicht mehr zu steigern ist’.

²⁹ With regard to ‘metaphor’, Liess (2004:161-162) infers as follows: ‘Im Prozeß der Metaphorisierung weitet sich der ursprüngliche Bedeutungsumfang einer Aussage ... Im Vorgang der Metaphorisierung bleibt die ursprüngliche Bedeutung folglich bestehen, zugleich bildet sich eine neue, bildliche Bedeutung aus, die sich aus dem metaphorischen Kontext ergibt ... Bezogen auf die Landthematik bedeutet dies, daß die geographische Bedeutung und der ursprüngliche Kontext nicht einfach abgelöst werden, sondern weiterhin mitaktualisiert werden können ... Das Bild steht in der Spannung zwischen der ursprünglichen Vorstellung und dem neuen Kontext’. Cf. also Hossfeld 1993:23.

1989:300). According to Childs (1985:243) the fundamental importance of the land throughout the Old Testament is of central theological significance. The history of Israel's encounter with the land through promise, conquest, expansion, exile and restoration formed the centre of a continual struggle to comprehend its theological significance. Von Rad (1989:168) pointed out that the *Heilsgeschichte* of the Hexateuch considers possession of the land of Canaan to be Yahweh's supreme gift of salvation and the fulfilment of the promise made to the patriarchs. A conspectus of all the references shows that the promise of the land is of even greater importance than the promise of becoming a nation. The God of the ancestors had already promised the possession of the land and a great posterity to Israel's ancestors while they lived in tents on the borders of the promised land.

The promise of the land, directed to the patriarchs and the people of Israel, permeates the Pentateuch. The Psalter uses the theology of the land in different ways. Important themes in the historical psalms are, for example, land invasion, possession of the land and forfeiture of the land. Whereas the historical psalms apply these themes to the whole of the nation of Israel, some psalms apply the 'promise of the land' to a limited number of people, namely only to those regarded as faithful to Yahweh (that is, the Yahweh pious).

The post-exilic wisdom Psalm 37 is a good example of a text in which the psalmic piety of the post-exilic period is combined with the motif of the land. Psalm 37, an acrostic wisdom psalm, uses the deuteronomic and deuteronomistic formula ירש ארץ (i.e. possession of the land) for the righteous as a kind of *Leitmotif*.³⁰ What usually happens in such situations of restoration, surely also took place in post-exilic Judah, namely the elite of the society easily got their share, while the little ones³¹ were pushed aside.³² This psalm in all probability refers to the small farmers, who increasingly faced class differences and were therefore at the risk of losing their land to the big landowners.³³ This

³⁰ Ps 37:9.11.22.29.34; synonyms in 37:18.27.29. Cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 1992:33; Hossfeld 1993:24 and Kaiser 2003:265f.

³¹ That is, the 'poor' and the 'captives'. Cf. also Isa 61:1: 'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners' (NRSV).

³² Albertz 2001:112; Berges 2001:73-4; Irsigler 1997:77-8 and Irsigler 1998:588-9. Cf. also Wengst (1987:48): 'Hier dürfen solche Menschen im Blick sein, die ihr Land ganz oder teilweise verloren haben, die von ihrem Grund und Boden verdrängt wurden'.

³³ Hossfeld 1993:24 and Wengst 1987:47. Cf. Isa. 65:21-22 witnessing to this situation: 'they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands' (NRSV).

concurr with the view of Nehemiah 5:1-5, according to which the poor, having mortgaged their fields in time of drought, or when taxes were raised, they found themselves foreclosed and, together with their children, reduced to servitude.³⁴ Psalm 37 does not promise possession of the land to the whole of Israel, as is the case in Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic literature.³⁵ It instead assumes an Israel already living in the land; some, however, are wicked while others adhere to Yahweh (in other words the 'just'). The latter, also called the 'poor' and the 'oppressed' in the land, are exhorted not to fret, but to keep their faith and hope in Yahweh. Possession of the land (ירוש ארץ) is promised to them, whereas the wicked will be destroyed in the end.³⁶

Verses 5-6 are characterised by land terminology. The motif of the cup (כוס – 5a) seems to fall outside this pattern. The formulation of Yahweh as 'my cup' is unparalleled in the literature of the Hebrew Bible (Lies 2004:190). Although we encounter in both the Old Testament and in iconographic representations of the ancient Near Eastern *Umwelt* the image of the deity holding a cup or handing down the cup to others to drink from, there seem to be no parallels to the designation of God as a 'cup'.

The question now arises how we should interpret this motif? It seems that cola 11bc may help us in this regard: 'in your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore' (NRSV); or a rather direct translation: 'satiation of joy in your face, pleasures in your right hand forevermore'. These cola seem to be permeated with temple theological motifs and semantics (cf. Lies 2004:248ff). At the background of colon 11b is the motif of 'satiation' (סבע). In this keyword we encounter the idea of a meal taking place at the temple, as becomes clear from the parallel examples in Psalms 63:6 and 65:5. Given this background, it is therefore possible to interpret the 'cup' of Psalm 16:5a as a cup used at a meal or a feast. This interpretation gets further support from the comparison between Psalms 16 and 23 – which (within the group of Psalms 15-24) are regarded as twin psalms.³⁷ The 'cup' also oc-

³⁴ According to Kippenberg (1978:59) 'die wichtigste Ursache aber war nach der Darstellung des Nehemia das Interesse der Vornehmen und Vorsteher an der Verschuldung ihrer ärmeren Mitbürger'. Cf. also Crüsemann 1985:213.

³⁵ In this regard Hossfeld (1993:24) infers as follows: 'die Sprache der traditionellen Landverheißung an das auserwählte Volk wird hier auf den Armen übertragen'.

³⁶ In this regard Lies (2004:167) infers as follows: 'Gottesbeziehung und Land sind eng miteinander verbunden, so daß schließlich in Ps 16,5-6; 73,26; 142,6 und Thr 3,24 in der metaphorischen Rede Gott selbst als 'Landanteil' bezeichnet werden kann. Dabei sind ... Aspekte, die in Ps 37 mit dem Land verbunden sind, auch in Ps 16 wichtig: die Schilderung der Lebensqualität, die Gottesbeziehung, die Vertrauens- und Schutzmotivik und der Aspekte der Dauerhaftigkeit'.

³⁷ Cf. Miller 1994:135. In this regard Hossfeld & Zenger (1993a:109) infer as follows: 'Im Komplex 15-24 hat Ps 16 sein theologisches »Pendant« in Ps 23 (vgl. Besonders 16,2 mit 23,6 und 16,11 mit 23,3,6'. Cf. also Hossfeld & Zenger (1993b:180-

curs in Psalm 23 in a comparative semantic *Umfeld*: ‘... my cup overflows’ (Ps 23:5). This leads to the conclusion that in both these psalms of confidence (Pss 16 and 23), the motif of the ‘cup’ refers to a cup used at a meal or a feast, and that in both of these psalms it expresses the superabundant fullness of blessing and life symbolised by the presence of God (Liess 2004:193). In Psalm 16 we actually encounter an intensification of this motif: Yahweh is the supplicant’s ‘cup’.

In conclusion: Psalm 16:5-6 is not only characterised by means of terms of land allocation. These two verses actually link two rich motifs, namely the metaphor of the ‘land’ and ‘land allocation’, with the metaphor of the ‘temple theology of life’. With regard to these two verses, Liess (2004:193-194) concludes as follows: ‘Mit beiden Metaphern, ‘JHWH als (Land-)Anteil’ und ‘JHWH als Becher’, ergänzt um die Motive ‘Los’ und ‘Meßschnüre auf lieblichem Land’, bringen V. 5-6 zum Ausdruck, daß JHWH sowohl Lebensraum, Lebensgrundlage wie auch Lebensfülle für den Beter ist ... Die Landtermini ... können so die neue Erfahrung einer besonders intensiven Gottesnähe und einer bleibenden Bewahrung angesichts des Todes zur Sprache bringen’.

4 Strophe D (vv. 7-8)

In verses 7-8 the supplicant reflects upon his experience of life, and that reflection issues forth in praise. His life has been a good one. It is, however, not the literal possession of the land that the psalmist speaks of; it is the divine counsel (7a) which has caused him such a joyous experience of life, and which makes him bless God. To ‘bless Yahweh’, is a response to his gracious help and to thank him for all the blessings (Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:144). It is an act of gratitude, devotion and solidarity with God. The supplicant praises Yahweh because He instructs him (‘he gives me counsel’). A further argument in favour of the ‘late dating’ of this text, is the fact that Yahweh as subject of the verb ‘counsel’ occurs only in late prophetic texts³⁸ – always in the sense of ‘determine, decide over’ (Gerstenberger 1991:91). Even in the deepest darkest night the supplicant’s kidneys will instruct him; the ‘kidneys’ being the seat of emotions and consciousness in Hebrew thought (Craigie 1983:155; Groenewald 2006:48-49;³⁹ Janowski 2003:170ff; Liess 2004:197f;⁴⁰ Wolff 1974:65-66).

181): ‘... Ps 23 ...[M]it seinem zur Mitte in Ps 19 symmetrischen Pendant, dem Ps 16, verbindet die Wegterminologie (16,10; 23,3), das Mitsein JHWHs (16,8; 23,4) und der Hinweis auf Güte und Gaben Gottes (16,2.11; 23,6). Ps 23 betont die Schutz- und Tischgemeinschaft des Armen mit JHWH und wie Ps 16 unterstreicht er deren Dauer sogar über den Tod hinaus (16,10f; 23,6)’.

³⁸ Cf. Isa 14:24, 27; 19:12, 17; 23:9; Jer 49:20; 50:45; 2 Chr 25:16.

³⁹ Cf. also Groenewald (2007:95): ‘Volgens die antropologie van die Ou Testament setel die mens se gevoelens en emosies in sy/haar niere (vgl. oa Klaagliedere 3:13; Job 16:13; 19:27; Ps 73:21). Baie belangrik is ook die feit dat die menslike gewete in die

The synonyms יעץ // יסר pi (v. 7ab – ‘advise // teach’) are two central lexemes which belong to the Wisdom tradition in the literature of the Hebrew Bible – they occur in the book of Proverbs, as well as in wisdom psalms and psalms which are influenced by the wisdom tradition.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that in the book of Proverbs it is mostly the father or the wisdom teacher who counsels and gives advice⁴² – but in Psalm 16 Yahweh takes over this role. Psalm 16:7 thus transforms these wisdom concepts, which were common in the paternal exhortation and instruction, to the point that Yahweh takes over the role of adviser and counsellor.

Verse 8 expresses unshakable confidence in the presence of Yahweh. The psalmist’s confidence in the face of mortal threat is based upon the fact that Yahweh is in front of him and always at his right hand (8). The expression ‘in front of me / at my right hand’ is an indication of Yahweh’s presence (Anderson 1972:145). They indicate God’s presence which will protect him

niere te vinde is. Volgens Psalm 16:7 stel die psalmis dit dat sy niere hom selfs in die nag vermaan, dit wil sê selfs in die nag praat sy gewete met hom. So verwyf die profeet Jeremia die goddeloses dat hulle net oor God praat, maar dat hulle Hom nie toelaat om hulle innerlike onderskeidingsvermoë te beïnvloed nie. In Jeremia 12:2 lees ons die volgende: ‘U is naby in hulle mond, maar ver van hulle niere’ (OAV). Daarom word van Jahwe gesê dat Hy die een is wat die hart en die niere van die mens ondersoek (Pss 7:10; 26:2; Jer 11:20)’.

⁴⁰ According to Liess (2004:198) ‘[d]ie Nieren, die in der alttestamentlichen Körpermetaphorik zu den wichtigsten Organen zählen, kommen in Ps 16 ... als Ort der innersten Empfindungen des Menschen in den Blick: Sie sind der Sitz des Gefühlslebens, der Emotionalität des Menschen ... Zugleich haben sie eine ethische Dimension: Sie werden als Sitz des Gewissens betrachtet und können deshalb in Ps 16 auch mit dem Verb *ysr* pi. aus dem Wortfeld weisheitlicher Unterweisung und Erziehung verbunden werden. Darüber hinaus gelten die Nieren – und dieser Aspekt ist für Ps 16,7 besonders wichtig – als Ort der Einwirkens Gottes auf den Menschen; sie bezeichnen “das innerste, verborgenen, nur Gott allein zugängliche Wesen des Menschen”. Sie sind konstitutiv für das Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Mensch und lassen sich daher auch als “sensibles Beziehungsorgan” bezeichnen, an dem sich der Konflikt mit Gott manifestieren, an dem aber auch die göttliche Unterweisung in besonderer Weise einwirken kann’.

⁴¹ Cf. Liess (2004:194) who lists all the occurrences of these lexemes within wisdom contexts.

⁴² Cf. Fohrer 1986:309; Schwienhorst-Schönberger 2006:376; Von Rad 1970:24, 31; Zenger 2006:332-333. According to McKane (1985:265) ‘[i]t preserves the flavour of the relationship between the wisdom teacher and the raw youths who come to be shaped by the educational process ... The educational process was more occupied with developing mature intellectual attitudes than with morality. Its concern was to impart negotiating skills, to nurture soundness of judgement and to produce a weighty and effective individual. It did not educate men to change the existing world into something better, but to make their way successfully in the world as it was’.

firmly through the tremors that seek to shake him to death. With such confidence the psalmist rejoices and exults.

5 Strophe E (vv. 9-11)

In the concluding section of the psalm 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 (Craigie 1983:158).⁴³ The acute concern of the psalmist was an immediate crisis and immediate deliverance. His body had been endangered and his life threatened with untimely termination in *Sheol*, the place of 'death'⁴⁴. The word *Pit* is poetically synonymous to *Sheol* (Van Uchelen 1986:104). According to Seybold (1991:137) the Underworld (*Sheol* and *Pit*), which is the sphere of a reduced and declining life-force, reaches far into the sphere of life itself, extending its dominion even to the living. One consequence of this insight is the fact that all those Psalm-texts speaking of salvation from death or from the Underworld, may have to be understood as testimonies of the experience of the living, of deliverance from the threat of death, and a return to life. This implies that the Psalms make no clear and unambiguous statement concerning a life 'on the other side' after death. The much discussed texts of Psalms 16:10; 49:16 and 73:24 do not demand a concept qualitatively different from the concept of the existence of the dead in the Underworld. According to Seybold (1991:137) the concept of an eternal life after death was not discovered in Israel until the late Hellenistic period. It seems first to be attested in the Wisdom of Solomon (1st century BCE).

Illness, misfortune, liability, hatred, and war can threaten life and lead to premature death. The supplicant thus proclaims that God's love will provide the inner strength through which he will be able to resist the fear of death – actually even death itself which is regarded as the force that destroys life (Zenger 1997:223).

Verse 9 reflects a pattern similar to the pattern we encounter in the preceding two verses. According to verses 7-8 the presence of God is present in the 'kidneys' (7b) and both 'before me' and at 'my right hand' (8ab), in other words, the presence of God is found both internally and externally. Verse 9 also has the twofold pattern: 'my heart' (9a) and 'my body' (בְּשָׁרִי – 9c) also reflect the 'inside' and 'outside' of the human being, in other words the supplicant in his totality.

⁴³ Craigie (1983:158), therefore, infers as follows: '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'.

⁴⁴ According to Barstad (1995:1452) '[i]deas of the underworld as the abode of the dead are known from ancient Israel, as well as from the surrounding cultures. In the Hebrew Bible *Sheol* is by far the most commonly used name for the netherworld ...'. Cf. also Berlejung 2006:400-401.

A central motif in verse 9 is the expression of trust (confidence) in colon 9c: ‘my body also rests / dwells secure’. The expression *שָׁכַן לְבִטָּח* (‘live / rest / dwell secure’) is a central motif in the texts about the promise of the land which occur in the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic literature (Deut 12:10; 33:12, 28) and in priestly literature (Lev 25:18f; 26:5). It also occurs in prophetic literature linked to the post-exilic promise of the return to the land (Jer 23:5; 32:37; 33:16; Ezech 28:26; 34; 25, 27, 28; 38:8, 11, 14; 39:26). Verse 9 thus does not only link to verses 7-8 in which the supplicant proclaims God to be his companion, but it even goes further back to verses 5-6 which have the ‘land’ as a theme (Liess 2004:206). The expression *שָׁכַן לְבִטָּח* (‘live / rest / dwell secure’) is thus associated with safety, security, protection against fear and panic, as well as a blessed life (cf. also Lev 25:19; 26:5). If verse 9 is read together with verse 10, the ‘theme of death’ becomes the focal point of this expression: ‘to live secure’ thus implies to be freed from death and the fear of death threatening the life of the supplicant.

Emerging confidently from that crisis of mortality, the psalmist acknowledges that God makes him to know, or experience, the ‘path of life’. This should not be seen as the afterlife, but as the fullness of life here and now, which is enriched by the rejoicing which emerges from an awareness of the divine presence (cf. also Anderson 1972:146).⁴⁵ It thus becomes a motif of God’s protection and his care of the supplicant: whoever God leads on the ‘path of life’ will experience a blessed life.

The expression ‘path of life’ furthermore only appears in Proverbs 5:6 and 15:24 (in this specific combination). Here in the wisdom literature it is an indication of a good, prosperous and long life. This kind of expression always occurs in antitheses to the realm of death, as can be seen from the following texts: Proverbs 2:18-19; 5:5-6 and 15:24 (Van Uchelen 1986:104). Janowski (2003:317) infers as follows: ‘Es geht also um das *Leben*, das der Beter *in der Gegenwart JHWHs* (“Gesicht Gottes”) und *auf Dauer* (“für immer”) als ein *erfülltes* (“Sättigung mit Freuden”) und *geborgenes Gut* (“Wonnen in deiner Rechter”) genießen kann’ (cf. also Liess 2004:237-248).

In colon 11b the supplicant states that there is fullness of joy in God’s presence (literally his ‘face’ – פָּנִים). Yahweh’s ‘face’ – or the reality of his presence – takes a central position in the Old Testament’s presentation of faith.⁴⁶ The פָּנֵי יְהוָה (‘the face/countenance of Yahweh’) is an image for Yahweh’s divine presence, as well as his personal appearance. This metaphor represents the deity who has a face and eyes and whose social mores are a reflection of the ruler’s or the king’s gestures of either averting or turning the face to the petitioner. Human beings – actually all living beings – can only live and accor-

⁴⁵ See Liess (2004:223-236) for the Egyptian background of this expression.

⁴⁶ Cf. Groenewald 2005:121ff.

dingly experience prosperity and health by the grace of the attentive countenance of God. The merciful and compassionate countenance of the deity implies life. The face of God (11b) and his 'right hand' (11c) are used synonymously. 'Right hand' also implies close presence, companionship, care and protection (Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:147). It also implies that God holds in his right hand gifts or blessings that will bring pleasure to the supplicant.

E CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion: according to the psalmist the source of joy is God's presence in his life. This joy is in contrast to death, because in the realm of death one is separated from God. With respect to the initial meaning of the text, it is probable that this concluding section should not be interpreted either messianically or in terms of individual eschatology (Craigie 1983:158). The psalmist was faced with imminent death, he rose in confidence above that danger to know the fullness of life in God's presence. The psalmist wrote from a particular experience, and yet his words touch 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.

The text of Psalm 16 touches upon important matters regarding the anthropological viewpoint of the people of Judah. According to them, they received life as a gift of benevolence from Yahweh. Human beings have the choice, opportunity and task to fill and fulfil their lives. Yahweh provides them with instruction and gives them strength to live accordingly. Life thus implies to live according to Yahweh's laws. Life furthermore implies the fulfilment of hope. It provides every human being with trust in God and courage which is necessary in order to face the challenges of life (e.g. death threats). This triad of 'life as a divine gift', 'life according to the law', and 'life as hope' is based on the fundamental chord of the introductory statement (v. 1-2) and the final statement (v. 11abc): Yahweh is the source of happiness and is the 'path of life'.

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