

# What David Saw: Messianic Exegesis in Acts 2<sup>1</sup>

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*Luke's use of Psalm 16 in two speeches in Acts reflects a kerygmatic view of Christ's death and resurrection. This paper explores his understanding of the psalm, informed by several OT texts, and suggests he believed David prophetically envisioned his house would continue and an heir would be raised from the dead, that David composed the psalm as a "Messianic speech" and possibly intended dual Messianic and self-referential meanings.*

## INTRODUCTION

Luke's use of Psalm 16 has long intrigued scholars.<sup>2</sup> He places a fairly long section—four verses (Ps 16:8-11)—on Peter's lips in the Pentecost speech (Acts 2:25-28); he reports Paul's brief citation of Ps 16:10 in the Pisidian Antioch speech (Acts 13:35). These are the only citations of Psalm 16 in the NT.<sup>3</sup>

In the explanatory remarks following the citation of Ps 16:8-11, the Lukan Peter, after arguing that the death and burial of the patriarch David excludes him from being the one referred to in the psalm, in one of those carefully worded yet highly evocative passages makes several remarkable claims.

In 2:30 he calls David a prophet (προφήτης οὖν ὑπάρχων, *prophētēs oun huparchōn*) and alludes to, rather than quotes, three critically important OT passages relating to God's promise to David of a permanent royal line: 2 Sam 7:12-13;

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<sup>2</sup> The psalm is numbered as Psalm 16 in the MT and in English translations, but as Psalm 15 in the LXX. Although Luke is citing from the LXX, in this paper I will refer to Psalm 16 except when referring specifically to Psalm 15 LXX. See H. W. Boers, "Psalm 16 and the Historical Origin of the Christian Faith," *ZAW* 60 (1969) 105-110; and Armin Schmitt, "Ps 16, 8-11 als Zeugnis der Auferstehung in der Apg.," *BZ* 17 (1973) 229-248.

<sup>3</sup> An allusion to Ps 16:5-6 may occur in Luke 10:42.

Ps 132:11; and Ps 89:4-5.<sup>4</sup> In 2:31 he claims that David, in composing Psalm 16, “looking forward” (προϊδών, *proïdōn*), “spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ.”

It is widely recognized that these statements, though occurring on the lips of Peter, reflect Luke’s hermeneutical outlook, which is the focus of this paper. Here I want to explore how Luke reads Psalm 16, or, to put it in simpler terms, what Luke thinks is being expressed in Psalm 16.

Let me state at the outset what I think Luke thinks:

First, David is the author of Psalm 16—it is a Davidic psalm.

Second, David envisioned that after his death someone in his family line would continue, perhaps re-establish, the house of David.

Third, David also believed that one of his successors, someone in his future family line, would be raised from the dead. He thought that a future Davidic heir would experience death but that this person’s body would not decompose because he would not “be abandoned to Hades”; instead he would “see life,” in other words, be raised from the dead.

Fourth, David, in composing Psalm 16, “spoke for” this future Messianic figure. David thus composed the psalm as a piece of “Messianic speech,” so that when followers of Jesus read or hear Psalm 16, they are hearing the Messiah himself speaking.

Fifth, *possibly*, David composed Psalm 16 to express two levels of meaning; first, the self-referential level, in which he was expressing his own confidence in Yahweh’s ability to deliver or protect him from sickness and death; and, second, a non-self-referential level, in which he was “speaking for” the future Messiah.

## PSALM 16 AS A DAVIDIC PSALM

In the Hebrew Bible this psalm bears the heading “A *mikhtām* of David” (מִכְתָּם דָּוִד), whose meaning is uncertain. In LXX, the title is Σηλογραφία τῷ Δαυιδ (*stēlographia tō David*), probably “a tablet inscription to David.”

The next psalm Luke cites, Psalm 110, in the Hebrew Bible bears the title “Of David. A psalm” (לְדָוִד מְזִמֹּר); its counterpart, Psalm 109 LXX, is titled “To David. A psalm” (τῷ Δαυιδ ψαλμός, *Tō David psalmos*). Although the dating, and even the meaning, of such titles is disputed by scholars, Luke, using an introductory formula, explicitly attributes both Psalms 16 and 110 to David (2:25,34).

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<sup>4</sup> As Richard Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009) 83 n. 76, observes, David is not called a prophet in the Hebrew Bible, but is so designated in 11QPs 27:2-11 and by Josephus, *Ant.* 6.166.

## A FUTURE DAVIDIC KING

Luke's views about David's vision of a future successor to his throne are informed by three OT texts that are not cited, but only alluded to, in 2:30: 2 Sam 7:12-13; Ps 89:4-5; and Ps 132:11. The first of these is the well-known oracle that Nathan delivered to David, which is recorded in 2 Sam 7:4-17. A prominent feature of Nathan's oracle is God's promise of a "house" (7:11), the mention of which prompts God, speaking through Nathan, to say:

<sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. <sup>15</sup>But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. <sup>17</sup>In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

The "offspring" (τὸ σπέρμα σου, 7:12) envisioned here is, of course, Solomon; and the "house" that he would build "for [God's] name" is Solomon's temple. But also envisioned is the permanence of the Davidic "house and kingdom" (7:16). David's throne, God promises, "shall be established forever" (7:16).

But Luke was also informed by another OT allusion from Psalm 132, a psalm *about* David, not a psalm *by* David. When Luke in Acts 2:30 reports Peter saying that David, "knowing that God swore in an oath to [David] that [someone] from the fruit of his loins would sit upon his throne," he is borrowing phraseology from Ps 131:11-12 LXX. The similarity of phrasing is quite striking:

Acts 2:30: εἰδὼς ὅτι ὄρκω ὄμοσεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς ἐκ καρποῦ τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ καθί-  
σαι ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ.<sup>5</sup>

Ps 131:11 LXX: ὄμοσεν κύριος τῷ Δαυιδ ἀλήθειαν καὶ οὐ μὴ ἀθετήσῃ αὐτήν· Ἐκ  
καρποῦ τῆς κοιλίας σου θήσομαι ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον σου.<sup>6</sup>

Other phrasing from the Psalter is probably also in view: Ps 88:4-5 LXX: "I made a covenant with my chosen ones; I swore (ὄμοσα, *ōmosa*) to David my slave: 'Forever I will provide offspring for you (τὸ σπέρμα σου, *to sperma sou*) and will build your throne for generation and generation'" (trans. *New English Translation of the Septuagint*).

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<sup>5</sup> Transliteration: *eidōs hoti orkō ōmosen autō ho theos ek karpon tēs osphuos autou kathisai epi ton thronon autou.*

<sup>6</sup> Transliteration: *ōmosen kurios tō David alētheian kai ou mē atheitēsei autēn Ek karpon tēs koilias sou thēsomai epi ton thronon sou.*

It is worth asking how Luke understood God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 132. Surely he understood that the successor to David envisioned in 2 Samuel 7, the one who would “build [God’s] house and establish his kingdom” is David’s son, Solomon. And similarly, Luke must have understood that the one “from the fruit of [David’s] belly” who would be placed on the throne, who was envisioned in Psalm 132:11, is Solomon.

How, then, did Luke conclude that 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 132 envisioned someone in the Davidic line long after the time of David and Solomon? He must have done so by construing the language of permanence literally.

In other words, when Luke read God’s promise to David in 2 Sam 7:16, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever,” or when he read the echo of that promise in Psalm 132, he imagined a time following the collapse of the United Kingdom when a Davidic heir would emerge to restore the House of David, thereby fulfilling God’s eternal promise.

### A RESURRECTED MESSIAH

Another line from 2 Samuel 7 is also evocative for Luke in another way. In 7:12 God says to David, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you (*ἀναστήσω τὸ σπέρμα σου μετὰ σέ, anastēsō to sperma sou meta se*), who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

Surely Luke must have known that ἀνίστημι (*anistēmi*) is being used here in the ordinary sense of finding, or appointing, a successor; or, if we retain the spatial connotation of “raise,” God would be promising to “elevate” or “exalt” David’s offspring to a position of honor, namely, to appoint him to the exalted position of king.

But at this point Luke seems to have been prompted to make an exegetical move similar to *g’zerah shavah* (גזרה שווה), one of Hillel’s seven rules in which the interpreter draws an inference from analogy.<sup>7</sup> The operative “parallel” passage for Luke is Ps 16:8-11, which is cited in Acts 2:25-28:

<sup>25</sup> I saw the Lord constantly<sup>8</sup> before me,  
because he is at my right hand to keep me from being shaken.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason my heart was glad  
and my tongue rejoiced,  
and furthermore, my flesh will live in hope,

<sup>7</sup> See Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987) 2:344.

<sup>8</sup> Gk. διὰ παντός (*dia pantos*, “always;” “continually”) See Luke 24:53; Acts 10:2; 24:16.

<sup>27</sup> because you will not allow my soul to remain<sup>9</sup> in Hades  
nor will you grant your Holy One to decompose.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>28</sup> You revealed to me the ways of life,  
you will make me full of joy with your presence. (My translation)

Although the term ἀνίστημι does not occur in this passage, Luke regards it as a critically important “commentary” on the meaning of ἀνίστημι in 2 Sam 7:12. Like his contemporary readers, Luke regarded Psalm 16 as a psalm written by David.

But unlike his contemporary readers, who thought the first person pronouns and adjectives in the psalm referred to David, and who read the psalm as David’s expression of faith in Yahweh as One who could (and would) deliver him from sickness and rescue him from death, Luke thought the psalm was speaking of someone other than David.

Luke’s logic is as follows: The psalm envisions someone speaking to Yahweh, who envisions Yahweh as ever before him, at his (the speaker’s) right hand, and thus as a source of constant assurance.

When the speaker of the psalm shifts to the second person singular (2:27), and the speaker asserts that Yahweh will neither “allow [his] soul to remain in Hades” nor permit “[Yahweh’s] holy one to see corruption” (in other words, would not permit his corpse to decompose), Luke concludes that David cannot possibly be the one addressing Yahweh because he did, in fact, die, and he was buried in a tomb on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and his body decomposed in that tomb.

Moreover, the “ways of life” that Yahweh revealed to the speaker must refer to something else, to some transcendent form of life in which Yahweh would be experienced as a joyful presence.

We are required to ask how compelling this logic is. As Kingsley Barrett observes, rather than reading Psalm 16 as asserting “protection from death (the theme of the Psalm in its original use),” Luke instead sees its main message as “deliverance from death.”<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, from Peter’s midrashic explanation in 2:31, the parallel promises in Ps 16:10 were the critically important determinants for Luke: “you will not abandon my soul to Hades” (ὅτι οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψεις τὴν ψυχὴν μου εἰς ᾅδην, *hoti ouk enkataleipseis tēn psuchēn mou eis hadēn*) and “you will not give your holy one to see corruption” (οὐδὲ δώσεις τὸν ὅσιόν σου ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν, *oude dōseis ton hosion sou idein diaphthoran*).

Luke’s thinking was also influenced by the last line of Ps 16:9, “and furthermore, my flesh will live in hope” (ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ σὰρξ μου κατασκηνώσει ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι,

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<sup>9</sup> So, BDAG, 273 s.v. ἐγκαταλείπω; NRSV “abandon my soul to Hades.”

<sup>10</sup> Lit. “see corruption” (ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν).

<sup>11</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994–1998) 1:144.

*eti de kai hē sarx mou kataskēnōsei ep elpidi*). This is evident because Peter’s explanation in 2:31b (οὔτε ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ εἶδεν διαφθοράν, *oute hē sarx eiden diaphthorān*) combines “flesh” (ἡ σὰρξ) from Ps15:9 LXX with “nor . . . see corruption” (οὐδὲ . . . ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν, *oude . . . idein diaphthorān*) from Ps 15:10b LXX.

It would be easy for Luke to imagine a “soul being abandoned to Hades” as someone’s “shadow” being confined to the realm of the dead, envisioned either as a temporary or permanent abode.<sup>12</sup> “Abandoned” suggests being forsaken by someone—being left alone, like a prisoner with no visiting rights. For someone’s “flesh” (σὰρξ) “to see corruption” (ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν) would naturally suggest the decomposition of a corpse.

Perhaps what tilted the scales for Luke was the mention of Hades (ᾗδης) and seeing corruption. Although ᾗδης, which occurs over 100 times in the LXX usually to render the Hebrew שְׁׁוֹל (*she’ól*) is sometimes used metaphorically to depict the depths of despair brought on by sickness or extreme distress,<sup>13</sup> more often it refers to the realm of the dead.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, there would have been ample reason for Luke to understand its use in Ps 16:10a in this sense—as assurance that Yahweh would not allow the soul of the one speaking in the psalm to remain confined in Sheol. Similarly, there was good reason to associate the term “corruption” (διαφθορά, *diaphthora*) with death that is followed by decomposition of the corpse.

“What profit is there in my blood,” the psalmist asks God, “when I go down to corruption” (ἐν τῷ καταβῆναί με εἰς διαφθοράν, *en tō katabēnai me eis diaphthorān*, Ps 29:10 LXX).<sup>15</sup> But in spite of some semantic fluidity associated with the terms “Hades” and “corruption,” it is hard to resist the conclusion that Luke, in his reading of Ps 15:8-11 LXX, especially vv. 10-11, has literalized a metaphorical text.

It was perfectly plausible, given the way in which “Hades,” and “see corruption” are used elsewhere in the Psalter, to read Ps 16:8-11 as a passage in which the psalmist David was expressing his faith in Yahweh, confidently claiming in the second person singular, “you (Yahweh) will not allow my soul to remain in Hades (where it has sunk through sickness and despair), nor will you give your holy one to see corruption by letting his [my] body deteriorate and weaken through sickness.”

It is worth asking whether the mention of “your holy one” (τὸν ὅσιόν σου, *ton hosion sou*) was a possible catalyst influencing Luke’s hermeneutical logic. To be sure, Luke uses “Holy and Righteous One” (τὸν ἅγιον καὶ δίκαιον; *ton hagion kai*

<sup>12</sup> On ἡ ψυχὴ as the “spirit” of the dead, see Robert Garland and John Scheld, “Death, attitudes to,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> ed; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 417-418; also C. Robert Phillips, III, “*manes*,” *OCD*<sup>4</sup>, 891.

<sup>13</sup> See Ps 17:6 LXX; 29:4 LXX; 48:16 LXX; 85:13 LXX; 114:3 LXX.

<sup>14</sup> See Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; Ps 6:5 LXX; 9:18 LXX; 30:18 LXX.

<sup>15</sup> See Ps 54:23 LXX.

*dikaion*) as a christological title in Peter's sermon before the Sanhedrin in Acts 3:14. This echoes the angel's proclamation in the Lukan Birth and Infancy Narrative that the child that would be born to Mary "will be holy" (ἅγιον).<sup>16</sup>

The spirit of an unclean demon recognizes Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ, *ho hagios tou theou*, Luke 4:34). At the prayer meeting in Jerusalem after Peter and John's release, "their friends," namely, the church, assert that "both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against [God's] holy servant Jesus (ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον παῖδά, *epi ton hagion paida*), whom [God] anointed" (Acts 4:27).

Continuing, they acclaim God as the one who extends a healing hand, enabling "signs and wonders [to be] performed through the name of [God's] holy servant Jesus (τοῦ ἁγίου παιδός, *tu hagiou paidos*, 4:30)."

While these passages confirm that Luke regarded "holy" (ἅγιος, *hagios*) as a christological epithet, and perhaps even as a title, there is no indication elsewhere that he uses the term found in Ps 16:10 (ὅσιος, *hosios*) to characterize Christ. If there is any compelling reason to believe that Christ as God's "Holy One" functioned as an important christological title or category for Luke, and thus played a catalytic role in his appropriation of Psalm 16 as a christological psalm, the case cannot be made on terminological grounds; instead it would have to be made because ὅσιος and ἅγιος are synonymous.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of whether we find Luke's hermeneutical logic convincing, what is abundantly clear is that when Luke read Ps 16:8-11, he saw embedded within it an anticipation of Christ's resurrection. The critically important assertion occurs in 2:31: "seeing in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ" (ποιδὼν ἐλάλησεν περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ; *poidon elalēsen peri tēs anastaseōs tou Christou*).

Although Luke's use of Ps 16:8-11 is often read as a Lukan "proof-text" that he adduces to prove that Christ was raised from the dead, in other words, to prove the possibility of Christ's resurrection, this is not the case. It is more accurate to say that Luke saw in Ps 16:8-11 an anticipation of Christ's resurrection.

His point is not so much that David's formulation in Ps 16:8-11 *proves* something that is otherwise incredible; it is rather that David's "prophetic psalm" saw in advance the event that Jesus' earliest followers understood as a given—not only as something that had occurred but as something that they had also experienced.

This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul argues for the emphatic "eventness" of Jesus' resurrection as the basis for believing in resurrection of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Luke 2:23, quoting Exod 13:2.

<sup>17</sup> Some have seen a terminological connection in Paul's Pisidian Antioch speech between ὅσιος that occurs in the snippet he quotes from Ps 15:10 LXX and the cryptic text from Isa 55:3 τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά.

dead in principle. Paul feels no obligation to “prove” Christ’s resurrection; this is a kerygmatic “given.” And from this he argues for the credibility of resurrection of *all the dead*.

### MESSIANIC SPEECH THROUGH THE PSALM

My fourth contention is that Luke read Ps 16:8-11 not simply as a psalm in which David spoke about Christ’s resurrection; or as a psalm that in some sense anticipated Christ’s resurrection. Luke also believed that Psalm 16 should be read as a piece of “messianic speech”—as words spoken by the Messiah himself.

Commentators express this in different ways. Haenchen says that here the psalmist “speaks in the person of the Anointed.”<sup>18</sup> Pesch writes that “in the psalm David speaks in the person of the Messiah.”<sup>19</sup> Jervell puts it this way, “The one speaking is not Jesus, but David speaks in the person of the Messiah.”<sup>20</sup>

Schneider also says that here David speaks in the person of the Messiah, but he elaborates further: “The words of the psalmist Luke regards as the words of Jesus Christ, whose “I” thus speaks in 2:25b-28.”<sup>21</sup> Wikenhauser observes that “the one speaking is thus no one other than the Messiah, whom God has raised.”<sup>22</sup>

Rather than claiming that the psalmist speaks in the person of the Messiah, I want to be more emphatic and claim that Luke thinks Psalm 16, though composed by David, is a piece of messianic direct speech. To read the psalm as Luke read it, the voice of David, the psalmist, must be muffled so that the voice speaking in the psalm is the Messiah himself.

How we understand who is speaking in the psalm partly depends on how we construe the introductory formula in 16:25a: Δαυιδ γὰρ λέγει εἰς αὐτόν (*David gar legei eis auton*). In rendering the phrase “For David says concerning him,” the NRSV follows the lead of most grammarians.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971) 181.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1-12)* (EKKNT; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995) 122.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 146, n. 237.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HThKNT 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1980–1982) 1:2733.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Wikenhauser, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1961) 45.

<sup>23</sup> BDAG s.v. εἰς 5, λέγειν εἰς τινα, “say with reference to someone,” citing Diodorus Siculus 11.50.4; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 77.1; similarly, L&N 2:801 (= § 90.23), εἰς meaning “in reference to” or “concerning,” citing Acts 2:25, “For David spoke concerning him.” A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 594, notes that λέγει εἰς in Acts 2:25 functions like a dative, although the sense in which it does so is not clear. Haenchen, 181 n. 3, also believes εἰς αὐτόν should be translated “concerning him.” Barrett, *Acts*, 1:127, “For David says of him”; Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 1:272, n. 81, “mit Bezug auf ihn.”

But is it possible that this problematic prepositional phrase might be rendered, “For David speaks *for* him”? This would adequately express the views of those who insist that in this psalm David is speaking in the person of the Messiah, or for him.

A few commentators, taking seriously that Psalm 16 may be an instance of “messianic speech,” have reflected further on what this might mean. Barrett, for example, allows that Luke may be understood in two ways: “If Luke thinks of David as speaking in his own person he will be expressing hope for the resurrection of Jesus; if he is speaking in the person of Jesus he will be referring to the interval between Good Friday and Easter Day.”<sup>24</sup>

Haenchen thinks that Ps 16:8-11 as quoted in Acts 2:25-28 “probably refer to Jesus’s earthly life in general, but include the hour of death on the Cross so that—on this interpretation of the psalm—Jesus did not feel forsaken of God.”<sup>25</sup> Noting that Luke omits the cry of derilection found in Mark and Matthew, Haenchen reflects on what “I saw the Lord always before me” might mean. If Ps 16:8-11 “is taken seriously as an utterance of Christ, [then Christ] saw God before him on the Cross and also throughout the ‘three days.’”<sup>26</sup>

Schneider also thinks that the section of Psalm 16 quoted in Acts 2 applies to Jesus’ earthly life including the hour of his death. Schneider thinks the Lukan version of Jesus’ word from the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46) is his way of expressing the sentiments of Ps 16:8, “I saw the Lord always before me.” Schneider goes even further to show how each phrase of Ps 16:8-11 resonated with other elements of the Gospel portrayal of Jesus’ life and death.<sup>27</sup>

These reflections by Acts commentators are suggestive of the ways in which Ps 16:8-11 can be understood as a piece of “messianic speech.” As the Passion Narrative, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, indicates, words from the Psalter on the lips of Jesus figured prominently in the earliest Christian memories of Jesus.

While the evangelists no doubt exercised some literary license in what OT language, especially from the Psalter, they attributed to Jesus, there is no reason to doubt that the historical Jesus would have recited the Psalter, especially in times of deep distress and during his final hours.

But the early church did not operate with the same sense of messianic existence that we do; nor did it view the Psalter in the same way we do. The midrashic rehearsal of the exodus and Israel’s experience in the wilderness in 1 Cor 10:1-5, in which “the spiritual rock that followed them [in the wilderness]” was Christ, clearly envisions Christ as present in some sense with Israel in the wilderness. In early Christian reflection Christ is not bound by time and space.

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<sup>24</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 1:145.

<sup>25</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 1:273-274.

Also instructive in this regard is the use of Ps 40:7-8 in Heb 10:5-7. Discussing Christ's sacrifice once and for all, the author confidently asserts that "when Christ came into the world," he said the words of this psalm.

What made this particular appropriation of the Psalter possible, of course, was the Septuagintal wording of Ps 39:7b LXX: "a body you have prepared for me" (σῶμα δὲ κατηρίσω μοι; *sōma de katērisō moi*).<sup>28</sup> This use of the Psalter in the Letter to the Hebrews conforms to the author's earlier pattern of citing OT passages as Christ's direct speech (Heb 2:11-13).

If the case of Hebrews is in any sense typical of early Christian exegesis, then we may not be too far off in suggesting that Luke regards Ps 16:8-11 as a piece of "messianic speech."<sup>29</sup> Luke clearly thinks that David wrote the psalm; he says so explicitly. But that would not prevent Luke from thinking that David, when composing the psalm, in some sense thought he was speaking for the Messiah. This introduces my fifth point.

## TWO LEVELS OF REFERENCE

As I have indicated, I am pretty confident that Luke believed the four things that I have already asserted. My fifth assertion I offer tentatively—as a possibility.

Is it possible that Luke believed that David, when composing Psalm 16, was actually functioning at two levels of consciousness? At the primary, self-referential level, he would have composed a psalm that reflected his own experience.

This would mean that the "I" speaking in the psalm is David, that the "Lord" is Yahweh, and that the sentiments expressed in the psalm reflect David's own experience. Read this way, the psalm is a declaration of faith and hope.

As Barnabas Lindars observes, "As it stands Ps 16 is a psalm of trust in time of sickness. The psalmist is confident that his fears of death will not be realized, and that he will live to rejoice in the knowledge of God's providence."<sup>30</sup>

Or as Fitzmyer says, "Psalm 16 is a lament, actually a psalm of personal trust in God; it expresses the psalmist's faith in God's power to deliver from evil and personal troubles, as he calls upon God to recall his constant seeking of refuge in divine help and makes renewed recognition of that help."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew reads "ears you have prepared for me." Later LXX revisers changed "body" to "ears" to make it conform to the Hebrew text. Thus the wording in Rahlfs LXX: ὠτία δὲ κατηρίσω μοι.

<sup>29</sup> If so, this passage would be another example of the interpretive practice discussed in Richard Hays, "Christ Prays the Psalms: Paul's Use of an Early Christian Exegetical Convention," in Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeke, eds., *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 122-136. I am thankful to Karen Jobes for pointing me to this article.

<sup>30</sup> Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 40.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 256.

But is it also possible that Luke believed that David, when writing Psalm 16, did so as a “prophet looking forward,” and saw the resurrection of Christ in advance?

But more than experiencing a prophetic vision of the future, David composed a psalm that simultaneously reflected his own experience and expressed his steadfast faith in God, but at the same time expressed the future (or perhaps present) Messiah’s confident faith that, although he would experience death, his soul would not remain in the Abode of the Dead and his body would not decompose in the normal way, but that he would experience the “ways of life” in the form of resurrected life that transcended death completely.

Naturally this would presuppose a highly sophisticated view of authorship, one with a bifocal vision, with one eye to the present, another to the future. But if Luke actually believed that the “I” speaking in Ps 16:5-8 is (or was) the Messiah, and the shift to the second person singular at v. 7 marks the beginning of a dialogue between the Messiah and Yahweh, how, then, does that occur?

Is David simply “speaking for the Messiah,” or “speaking in the person of the Messiah,” as some commentators suggest? Are we to imagine David engaging in some form of ventriloquism? And when would the Messiah actually have experienced or expressed these sentiments? During the events of his Passion?

If we are trying to determine what Luke actually believed about David’s composition of Psalm 16, it seems plausible that he imagined David operating at two levels of consciousness and referentiality—one with reference to himself, the other with reference to the Messiah. In one instance, he was speaking—and speaking genuinely; in the other instance, he was not only speaking for the Messiah, but he was giving the Messiah a voice.

## **PSALM 110**

In having Peter expound the significance of Psalm 16, Luke was on unfamiliar ground; but when he introduces Psalm 110, he is dealing with an OT text that he knew from the Synoptic tradition. Jesus’ citation of Psalm 110 during Passion Week is part of the Triple Tradition (Mark 2:35-37a; Matt 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44).

Jesus’ introductory words are, “How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David?” Jesus then says, “David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”’”

Jesus’ explanatory remark takes the form of a rhetorical question: “David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?” The interpretive question that Jesus targets is the identity of the two “Lords” in Psalm 110.

The first “Lord” who speaks is obviously Yahweh, but who is “my Lord” to whom Yahweh speaks, instructing this second Lord to sit at his (Yahweh’s) right hand until all of his enemies have been completely subjugated, in other words,

placed under his feet? If David calls the addressee “my Lord,” the latter must be in a superior position to David. The logic of Psalm 110 implies that the second “Lord” is David’s “Lord,” not “David’s son.”

In this interchange, Jesus cites Psalm 110 but does not actually apply the psalm to himself. The Triple Tradition recognizes that Psalm 110 is associated with Jesus’ messianic identity, but neither the three evangelists nor Jesus specifically claim that the “Lord” to whom Yahweh speaks in the psalm is Jesus Christ.

In Acts 2, however, Luke makes this connection explicit in a way that he does not in Luke 20:41–44. His kerygmatic claim in Acts 2:33 is that “this Jesus God raised from the dead” is the one whom the apostles have witnessed, and he has been “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:32–33).

Again, using the same logic that he used to interpret Psalm 16, Luke eliminates David as the referent of Psalm 110 because “he did not ascend into the heavens.” Luke apparently knew of no exaltation traditions connected with David comparable to those that developed around Moses.

That Luke explicitly connects Jesus with Psalm 110 is clear from his use of the phrase “at God’s right hand” (Acts 2:33). The one whom Yahweh instructs to sit “at my right hand” (Ps 110:1) is “this Jesus” whom God raised and exalted to this unique position of honor.

What is remarkable about this Lukan piece of midrashic exegesis is the way in which he juxtaposes Ps 110:1 with Ps 16:8–11. The former he had received—and knew—from Mark (or the Synoptic Tradition), but no other NT writer places it alongside Ps 16:8–11.

Eric Franklin astutely observes that Luke does not pick up on the reference to the “right hand” in Ps 16:8, because he wants to highlight its occurrence in Ps 110:1. He writes:

Verses 33 and 34a differentiate between the resurrection and ascension and the two are justified by different proof-texts, the former by Psalm 16, and the latter by Psalm 110. By omitting the last verse of Psalm 16, Luke limits its application to the resurrection alone and so is able to make the ascension the fulfillment of Psalm 110, which is given a crucial significance in this speech.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most well-known, and distinctive, features of Luke’s Christology is his two-stage schematization of Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension forty days later.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 33; noted and confirmed by Pervo, *Acts*, 82 n. 73.

<sup>33</sup> The problems relating to the report in Luke 24:50–53 that Jesus ascended into heaven on Easter Sunday are well known, as are the text-critical variations that seek to harmonize Luke 24 with Acts 1:6–11, which reports the Ascension forty days after Pentecost.

As Lindars observes, “The idea of the Resurrection and Ascension (or Heavenly Session) as separate, successive events is a schematization devised by Luke for ease in the presentation of his material. Outside the Lucan literature all the evidence points to the conclusion that they were originally considered to be simultaneous, or rather as different aspects of one truth.”<sup>34</sup>

Whether Luke’s narrative presentation of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension as two separate events derives from his reading Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 alongside each other, and concluding that the former envisions the Messiah’s resurrection—his escape from the confinement of Hades and bodily decomposition—while the latter envisions an exaltation *following* his deliverance from death, is difficult to say.

But we can follow his logic. Resurrection *per se* does not necessarily imply heavenly exaltation, even though some NT writers, such as the author of Hebrews, tend to fuse resurrection with exaltation and see them as a single moment or event. One might imagine someone being resurrected and eventually dying at some future date.

But a resurrection followed by a dramatic ascension into heaven and being seated at the right hand of the enthroned God defines the new, resurrected life as definitively “everlasting.”

Or, perhaps the reverse was true: the tradition(s) to which Luke has access saw Jesus’ resurrection and ascension as two chronologically distinct moments, and he needed to find scriptural warrant for reporting them that way; and introducing Ps 16:8-11 as a Davidic text that “foresaw” the “holy one’s” resurrection and Ps 110:1 as a companion Davidic text that “foresaw” the Messiah’s exaltation to God’s right hand provided him scriptural warrant for the traditions he had received. Either way, his exegesis of Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 coheres with his narrative presentation of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension.

## CONCLUSION

This has been an attempt to analyze Lukan hermeneutics as reflected in Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. My focus has been the two passages from the Psalter that Luke interprets christologically, or messianically.

His exegesis is intriguing here because he deals with one Psalm text—Ps 110:1—already embedded in the Gospel tradition and reportedly cited and interpreted by Jesus himself; but with another Psalm text—Ps 16:8-11—that no other NT writer cites or alludes to.

In the latter case, we have asked whether Luke’s interpretive logic reflects an overly literal reading of the Psalter, one in which he fails to see that metaphorical expressions such as “one’s soul being confined to Hades” or “one’s flesh seeing

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<sup>34</sup> Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, 42.

corruption,” or experiencing bodily decomposition, could be used poetically to express the dire extremes to which sickness or danger could lead.

Even so, our analysis has suggested that Luke is not a casual reader of the Psalter; nor does he operate with a simple scheme of one-to-one correspondence comparable to the fulfillment quotations in Matthew 1–2. He is rather a reader for whom Christ’s death and resurrection are kerygmatic—they are experiential, “givens.”

But rather than adducing Ps 16:8-11 as a “proof-text” of the resurrection in the sense that we normally associate with the term “proof-text,” Luke infers from several OT texts, most notably 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 132, that Scripture envisioned a Davidic successor other than David’s direct “seed,” Solomon; that this Davidic heir would experience resurrection as David himself had foreseen in Ps 16:8-11; that Jesus’ resurrection fulfilled that Davidic “prophecy”; and that this Davidic heir was not only raised from the dead but also exalted to God’s right hand in a way that David himself never was or never could be. <sup>Scj</sup>