

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Psalms 16, ESV.

16 A MIKTAM OF DAVID.

- ¹ Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.*
- ² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."*
- ³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.*
- ⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.*
- ⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.*
- ⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*
- ⁷ I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.*
- ⁸ I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*
- ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.*
- ¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*
- ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

My kidneys also instruct me in the night seasons.

I recently talked to a woman who had been successfully treated for kidney cancer. They had removed one kidney, the other was quite healthy, and two years had gone by. She was in the hospital for some sort of routine follow up. She asked me to read Psalm 16 to her. It is titled “*A Miktam of David*”, and as soon as I read the title to her, she asked me what *Miktam* means. In truth, no one knows for sure. There are six Psalms with this title, and they are all attributed to King David. Some people believe that this word is related to the Hebrew word for “writing”, which is “*miktab*”. There is also a Hebrew word which means “engraving”, “*katham*” that is very possibly related to the word “*Miktam*”. So, the first theory is that a Psalm with this title is to be valued so highly that it is worthy of being engraved on a tablet in order to keep it preserved. An entirely different, second theory is that “*miktam*” is a music term telling a musician how the tune that accompanies the Psalm should be played. This woman, and we’ll call her Zoe, said that she liked the first theory, because indeed Psalm 16 is deeply engraved on her heart.

Psalm 16 is fairly short. We have looked at part of it quickly in a different context. I’d like to take a very close look at this Psalm today. Here is how it begins:

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

² *I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.”*

Given the tone of this Psalm, and the fact that it is focused so heavily on laying one's trust entirely in God, and on some of the Hebrew terms used in the Psalm, it is thought to have probably been written by a priest – and not King David. The opening is fairly generic in the sense that the psalmist is simply declaring full trust in God, full dependency on God, and full faith that God will always protect the psalmist – or whomever is reading or singing the Psalm.

In the next two verses, the psalmist makes it clear to God the people with whom the psalmist identifies and the people with whom the psalmist does not want to be identified. The first group are dedicated followers of God and the second are those who worship pagan gods:

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

⁴ *The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.*

It's believed that the statement about drinking blood offerings refers to some known pagan ritual of the time.

The next two verses, 5 and 6, is a statement by the psalmist that God has indeed blessed him mightily already.

⁵ *The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;*

you hold my lot.

⁶ *The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*

It was just after I read these two verses that Zoe stopped my reading for the first time. She said that this part meant a lot to her, that it was only after her kidney was removed, and she was given radiation treatments, and then told she would not have to have chemotherapy, and a year went by with no signs of cancer that she began to realize how blessed she was. And it wasn't just being cured of cancer. All the blessings she had gotten in life suddenly began to fill her mind. They would come to her during the day while she was working at her computer or at home doing housework or cooking or most significantly, taking care of her little girl who was in elementary school. She began to search the Bible for something that would connect with her feelings – and she discovered Psalm 16.

The next two verses, 7 and 8, are a statement of praise, where the psalmist or the reader of the Psalm says three things: First, God provides guidance all day long, every day, and all during the night, as well. Second, the psalmist or reader deliberately keeps God foremost in his or her mind at all times. Third, because of this, nothing can make the reader frightened.

⁷ *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;*

in the night also my heart instructs me.

*⁸ I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*

Zoe grew very emotional at this point, saying that it was verse 7 that caused her to connect so strongly with this Psalm. It had to do with being given counsel in the night. She said that she often woke up at night, not long after falling asleep, frightened that her cancer would return. This would happen over and over during the night. Zoe said that she stayed busy during the day, but it was at night when her subconscious apparently was busy cranking away, making her anxious, waking her up. I asked her why this verse connected with her so strongly, given that she was anxious in the night and apparently therefore didn't feel the presence of God's counsel. She said that this was when she prayed. Each time she woke up, feeling nervous, she would turn to God, and although it wouldn't usually last through the night, she would feel a calmness come over her and she would fall back asleep. She said, however, that the constant waking up and going back to sleep and waking up again made the night feel like it was far longer than just seven or eight hours. I told her that in fact, the translation I had just read her, the English Standard Version, perhaps wasn't the most accurate for verse 7. I told her that some translations, like the New King James, read like this:

⁷ *I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel;
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.*

Indeed, the Psalm says that the night is an entire season. Zoe was wide-eyed at this. She said that just like verse 8 says, whenever she woke up, she would place God before her and talk to God, but silently, so she would not wake up her husband. Knowing that the Psalm talks about the night as being like a full season make her realize that there was a continuity during the night, with her prayers making her feel more and more relaxed each time she woke up. That sense would grow in her. And, in fact, the night would usually end with her getting at least three or four hours of uninterrupted sleep.

The last three verses of Psalm 16, verses 9 to 11, return to this idea of putting one's trust fully in God. The psalmist or the reader acknowledges that this provides security and a deep sense of joy. And importantly, there will be no end to God's guidance. Zoe had a question about these verses:

⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.*

¹⁰ *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*

¹¹ *You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

She wanted to know if Sheol was hell. I told her no, that we are not completely certain of the meaning of this term, and that there has been a lot of misconception about its meaning over the centuries. It is definitely not Hell. The word Sheol appears 66 times in the Bible. The ancient Hebrews and Israelites, the people of the age of the Psalms, did not have a full notion of an eternal life after death. Sheol was a dark place, but not a place of punishment or suffering. It was essentially a holding place for the dead. All people went to Sheol when they died. While Hell is a separation from God, the Bible makes it clear that God is in Sheol. There is no Satan in Sheol. It is essentially a place of eternal sleep. Zoe smiled and said that indeed, she is not ready to sleep forever, not yet. She has a lot of life left to live and a lot of reasons to live that life. She preferred to remain on the path of life and on the path of eternal life. She felt that she was far more capable of living in joy than she was before her kidney was removed.

It was then that I told her that there was something about the Hebrew in Psalm 16 that she might not be aware of, something humorous. I told her that the Hebrew word for “heart” in verse 7,

*I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel;
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.*

is actually the word “kidneys”, that the ancient Israelites considered the kidneys to be the center of our emotions, of our consciences, of our unconscious thoughts, and that modern translators typically use the word “heart” or “conscience”. That word is “*kilyot*”, and it does literally mean “kidneys”. So, verse 7 in the original Hebrew reads: *My kidneys also instruct me in the night seasons*. I told her that she had connected with a Psalm that says that God gives her counsel in the season of the night, and that God connects with her through her kidneys. Zoe didn’t laugh; rather, she said that this was beautiful, that it meant that Psalm 16 was truly for her. Zoe drifted off to sleep thinking about her connection with Psalm 16, how God had placed that Psalm in the Bible for millions to read, but in particular, for her to read. The next day, Zoe had gone home.

I often suggest that you try reading the Bible if you do not already. I firmly believe that if you just give it a little bit of time on an ongoing basis, something will absolutely connect with you. You’ll find a Psalm, a Proverb, a passage, maybe an entire chapter of some book of the Old or New Testament that speaks to you. That is the nature of Scripture. It is meant for everyone. God does not leave anyone out.

As I wrote this, it was around midnight, and I had just gotten home after spending time with two patients and their families as the patients passed away.

One was young and one was elderly. Both were deeply loved and the mother of the young patient and the daughter of the elderly patient both asked me to read Bible passages that had meant a lot to their loved ones. Something very profound happens when you finally find your home in the Bible. I don't mean just that one passage that strikes you in a very personal way. I'm referring to becoming so comfortable with the Bible that you want to read it, you need to read it, and in fact, when almost every time you do read the Bible the words feel very intimate, very powerful – feel like they are a part of you. It's because when you get to that point, you also feel a deep attachment to God, to Jesus Christ. Here is the 20th verse of Chapter 2 of Galatians, a letter written by Paul, the man who spread the faith far and wide, the man who very much lived for God and Christ. Galatia was a region in what is now north central Turkey, and it now contains Ankara, the capital of Turkey:

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

A powerful path to a life that is truly a life of faith is through Scripture. It changes you in a major fashion. You begin to feel not just yourself inside of you, but Christ, who lives inside you. That is why Jesus walked the Earth, so that we could have that deeply personal - literally personal - relationship with God. And God

saw to it that Scripture, Hebrew and Greek, survived when almost all documents that existed at that time are now gone. Set the Lord before you, as Psalm 16 tells us, read Scripture, and discover Christ within you. Please pray with me.

God, thank you for your determination to make us recognize your presence within us. Thank you for the path you have laid down for us. May we always remember that faith is not found in a church or a ritual. Faith is found deep within us. We simply need to set it free to overcome us. Amen.