

PSALM 116

CHRIST'S PRAISE FOR DELIVERANCE FROM HELL

AUTHOR: Anonymous

INTRODUCTION: There is no superscription attributing this psalm to a human penman. This is probably fitting, as the subject is Jesus Christ in Hell petitioning the LORD for deliverance. It is a Hallel psalm (i.e., a psalm of thanksgiving) in which Christ praises the LORD for His deliverance from Hell in accordance with His promise (cf. Ps16:10).

- [1] The person who is the subject of this psalm has petitioned "the LORD" in prayer, and his "supplications" have been "heard" (and the implication is answered). The subject of the petitioner's prayer will be revealed beginning in v4.
- [2] Because the LORD has answered his prayer, he will "love the LORD" (v1) and "call upon Him as long as I live". The petitioner has responded to the goodness of the LORD with lifelong devotion to Him (Cp., Job1:8-12, 20-21).
- [3] The petitioner is in "the sorrows of death" and "the pains of hell" (i.e., he has died and gone to hell). This is something akin to Jonah, who prayed "out of the belly of hell" (Jon2:2).

Sheol and Modern Bible Versions. The Hebrew word translated as "hell" is *sheol*, often transliterated in modern Bible versions. The Hebrew *sheol* has a wide range of meaning, from "the grave", to "hell" (i.e., the temporary place of torment following death, essentially equivalent to the Greek *Hades*; Luk16:22-23), to the eternal "the lake of fire"; its meaning in any particular passage must be derived from context. Many theologians deny that Christ suffered in "hell", choosing to interpret occurrences of *sheol* in connection with Christ as meaning merely the sepulcher in which His body resided for three days (Cp., Ps16:10). But here, the petitioner is experiencing "sorrows" and "pains", such that the conclusion that *sheol* should be rightly interpreted to mean "hell" is inescapable.

- [4] The petition of the LORD was, "I beseech thee, deliver my soul". According to Psalm 16:9-10, it is prophesied of Messiah that, "... my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption". Although David was the author of Psalm 16, he never went to "hell" (Cp., Act2:5-30). Thus, the petitioner in Psalm 116 is the Messiah, and His prayer to the LORD is that His soul be delivered out of hell.

Why/When is Messiah in Hell? On the cross, the sins of the world were imputed to Christ (cf. Isa 53:6,10; Jn1:29; 2Cor5:21), for which He suffered to propitiate the wrath of God (1Jn2:2). Many presume that merely the physical death of Christ was sufficient for propitiation. However, the debt every sinner owes is both physical death (cf. Gen2:17; 3:19; Rom6:23) and an eternity spent in the Lake of Fire, which is the "second death" (cf. Rev20:13-15); thus, the "second death" is required

of Christ to make propitiation for every man¹. However, as an infinite divine Person, Christ could pay an eternal penalty for every person in a finite amount of time.

As for when Christ was in hell, it was apparently not the three days and three nights that His body spent in the sepulcher. Christ told the thief on the cross, "Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luk23:43). Thus, following His death, Christ's body was buried and His soul went to "paradise" (a.k.a., Abraham's bosom; Luk16:22-23). Presumably, Christ's soul suffered in hell during the three hours of darkness on the cross, at the end of which He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt27:45-46; Mk15:33-34).

- [5] The LORD responds to Messiah's request by being "gracious" and "merciful" to Him. This language is both technical and profound. By definition, it is never mandatory for the LORD to show grace or mercy. Thus, the LORD was not obligated to deliver the Messiah from hell. Had He chosen not to do so, the work necessary for our justification would not have been completed (Cp., Rom4:25).
- [6] "I was brought low" is an allusion to Christ's humiliation, which includes both His becoming a Man as well as His suffering of death (cf. Philip2:5-8).
- [7] The "LORD" dealt "bountifully" with the "soul" of Christ, giving it "rest"; Christ offers this "rest" for the "souls" of all those who come to Him (Cp., Matt11:28-29).
- [8] That the LORD "hast delivered my soul from death" (not sheol) anticipates the resurrection of Christ (1Cor15:20), as well as "they who are Christ's at his coming" (1Cor15:23). The condition of no more "tears" or "falling" has our glorified state in a resurrection body in view.
- [9] This is a clear allusion to a bodily resurrection (Cp., Job19:25-26); he who was dead will again "walk before the LORD in the land of the living", which anticipates the Millennial Kingdom in which "the LORD" will be physically present in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Dan7:13-14; Zech14:9; Luk1:31-33).
- [10] This verse is quoted in 2 Corinthians 4:13. Here it has in view the faith² of Christ, who "believed" the promise of God to deliver His soul from Hell (Ps16:10) and give to Him eternal life (Tit1:1-2); the faith of Christ becomes both the pattern for believers to follow as well as the perfect "faith of Christ" imputed to them (Cp., Rom3:22; Gal2:16).
- [11] "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom3:4) expresses the idea in view here, that "All men are liars". This is in contradistinction to the fact that, "God ... cannot lie" (Tit1:2). Thus, the faith of Christ was placed in the sure word of God.

¹ This truth is evident in the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant. It was not sufficient for the sacrificial animal simply to be killed, but its carcass had to be burned on the brazen altar (the fire of which never went out; cf. Lev6:13), thus typologically depicting both physical death and the second death in the Lake of Fire.

² In its simplest form, "faith" is believing what God has said.

- [12] What should the response of the believer, both Christ and us, be to the "grace" and "mercy" (v5) the LORD has shown to us? The answer begins in vers 13. Note, a similar question was posed by the Apostle Paul (1Thess3:9).
- [13] "I will take the cup of salvation"; note that "salvation" must be received (cf. Jn1:11-12). It is received by faith, expressed here as "call[ing] upon the name of the LORD" (Cp., Joel2:32; Act2:21; Rom10:13).
- [14] The "vows" that must be paid differ. For the Jew under the Mosaic covenant, it was obedience to the Law (cf. Exod19:8; Deut28:1-2). For the believer today under grace, it is to offer our "bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom12:1) and "the sacrifice of praise continually to God" (Heb13:15).
- [15] After the work of Christ, "death" is no longer an enemy to be feared for "saints" (i.e., believers; Cp., 1Cor15:54-57; Rev14:13).
- [16] The work of Christ "hast loosed [the] bonds" of the believer. He is no longer under bondage, but he is free to become the "servant" of the "LORD". Here, "servant" is used in the sense of a bondservant, one who for love of his Master has freely (without compulsion) chosen to serve Him forever (cf. Exod21:5-6). In Greek, δουλος is the word used for this kind of "servant", which the Apostle Paul often used of himself (cf. Rom1:1; Philip1:1; Tit1:1).
- [17] This verse is Christ speaking as the representative of the nation of Israel. During the Tribulation, the nation of Israel will be brought to the place in which they are "willing" to serve the LORD (Cp., Ps110:3).
- [18] See v14.
- [19] In this verse, the presence of "the LORD" is in the "midst" of His "house", which is the Temple. Thus, the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic aspects of this psalm will be in the kingdom (i.e., Millennium), when the Temple of the LORD has been restored (Ezekiel 40-48).