

OVERVIEW: In this psalm's movement from cry for help to affirmation of God's rule and blessings, the reformers, propelled by Peter's apostolic warrant in [Acts 2](#), find the acts of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Even the psalm's title—for all our exegetes except Calvin—authorizes this view: *miktām*, that is, “a golden jewel,” clearly indicates that the psalm's content is about [Jesus](#). Nevertheless there is some variance in how these commentators apply christological interpretation. Münster holds David and Christ together, confirming that these experiences were true of David's life while also asserting these things—and similar Old Testament events and prophecies—to be fulfilled in Christ. Cajetan, in contrast, understands this psalm to be about Christ literally, rather than typologically, because these words are too great for any mere human being. And Luther reminds his students and readers that exegesis and theology are inseparable. As Mickey Mattox summarizes concerning Luther's methodology, “The knowledge of God, given in authentic Christian faith could not be bracketed out of properly Christian biblical study, reflection and exegesis. To put the matter in terms Luther himself used, the ‘substance of Scripture’ (*res Scripturae sacrae*) holds the key to the ‘words of Holy Scripture’ (*verba Scripturae sacrae*).”¹ Without Christ as its master, for Luther and many of his peers,

grammar is a blind and false tyrant.

THE APOSTLES HAVE PROVEN THAT THIS PSALM—AND ALL SUCH PSALMS—IS LITERALLY ABOUT CHRIST. CARDINAL CAJETAN: The chief apostles, Peter and Paul, have informed us of this psalm's subject matter. For Peter in [Acts 2](#) uses several verses from this psalm to reveal Christ's resurrection, affirming that David is not talking about himself but about Christ when he said, “You will not abandon my soul to hell, nor will my flesh see corruption,” because David's body was in the grave all those years. Similarly Paul in [Acts 13](#) quotes the same words and by the same reasoning affirms that David said Christ's body would not see corruption.

From this not only do we see this psalm's subject matter to be Christ's resurrection, etc., but we also pick up a gen-

¹ Mickey L. Mattox, “[Luther's Interpretation of Scripture: Biblical Understanding in Trinitarian Shape](#),” in *The Substance of Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Paul R. Hinlickey, 11–57 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), here 46; cf. Luther, “Treatise on the Last Words of David (1543),” [LW 15:266–70](#) (WA 54:29–31). See further Stephen G. Burnett, “[Reassessing the ‘Basel-Wittenberg Conflict’: Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship](#),” in *Hebraica Veritas?: Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 181–201.

eral rule for how to understand the psalms when they speak of David: surely because these psalms, which are said to be about David, do not fit David himself, they are understood about Christ. For by this reasoning, maintaining that the truth of these words—“do not let your Holy One see corruption”—concerning David is not possible, each apostle asserted that David’s words were about Christ’s promise. And note this: because we follow these rules in the literal exposition of the psalms, such expositions are founded on apostolic authority. COMMENTARY ON PSALM 16.²

GRAMMAR ALONE IS INSUFFICIENT FOR THE TASK OF TRANSLATION. MARTIN LUTHER: On 🚩 March 27, 1538, Dr. Luther mentioned Sebastian Münster and other Hebraists who scourged him concerning his translation of the Bible for not following the rules of grammar: “Indeed grammar is necessary for declining words, conjugating verbs and construing syntax, but for the proclamation of the meaning and the consideration of the subject matter, grammar is not needed. For grammar should not reign over the meaning. As in Psalm 16 they scourge me: ‘Preserve me, O Lord.’ The entire psalm is in the person of Christ and this is its meaning: *O Lord God, see I am dying not on account of my sin*

but on account of the people’s sin. ‘Preserve,’ that is, let me rise again, because I hope in you. ‘I said,’ that is, my confession is in you, that you are my Lord, for I do not lack goods. We translate it this way: ‘I suffer for your sake,’ as if he would say, because I am dying for sin, I am not able to have any good. For the Hebrew words are *tôbātî bal-‘ālêkā*, that is, on account of you there is no good for me. Certainly with the greatest care we consider the subject matter and the meaning, before we decide how to translate. Nevertheless we are scourged.” TABLE TALK: ANTON LAUTERBACH (1538).³

Superscription: *What Does Miktām Mean?*

MIKTĀM COULD MEAN SEVERAL THINGS. FELIX PRATENSIS: There is not a little ambiguity among Hebrew authors concerning *miktām*. Some say it is the name of some musical instrument. Others posit that it means either a musical instrument or a healed wound: when this kind of word is placed before the word *David*, it means musical instrument; but when it is placed after “David,” they assert, it means “healed wound.” Others interpret it as an emblem. For the word from which it seems to be derived is *ketem*, which means “a lump of the finest gold.” And they say that it indicated David’s own mili-

² Cajetan, *In Sacrae Scripturae Expositionem*, 3:53; citing Acts 2:25–33; 13:35–39.

³ WATR 3:619, no. 3794.

tary rank, as in those days cavalry who achieved some illustrious feat were accustomed to wear gilded armor. THE HEBREW PSALTER.⁴

MIKTĀM IS A TYPE OF TUNE. JOHN CALVIN: Concerning the word *miktām* the Hebrew expositors are not agreed. Some derive it from *ketem*, as if it were a golden emblem. Others think it is the beginning of a popular and well-known song. To others it seems rather to be some kind of tune. This last opinion I approve of. COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS.⁵

MIKTĀM APPLIES TO DAVID. MARTIN LUTHER: *Miktām* could be understood about David in this way: this psalm was revealed to David himself as golden—that is, by a prophet according to divine illumination—because gold symbolizes knowledge of the new grace and law, silver the old. And he understood the mystery and spirit of the letter. So this title is happy boasting, like in [2 Samuel 23](#): “The eminent man, the psalmist of Israel said.” So also here: this psalm is a *miktām*, that is, from one more excellent than other prophets and from one more eminent

than other psalmists, like gold among other metals. GLOSSA ON [PSALM 16](#) (1513–1515).⁶

MIKTĀM INTIMATES THE GOLDEN CONTENT: CHRIST. RUDOLF GWALTHER: This psalm David called “a golden jewel.” For in it he describes his highest good and only treasure.... Now because David was a figure and depiction of Christ, several things are indicated here which according to the letter cannot be understood about anyone other than Christ—as the holy apostles interpreted it, too. THE PSALTER.⁷

⁴ Pratensis, *Psalterium*, 9r. Kraus rejects the translation of *miktām* as “golden jewel” (Abraham Ibn Ezra) out of hand; he prefers “stelographic publication” (στηλογραφία, cf. [LXX](#))—though he admits this too is speculative. See Kraus, *Psalms* 1–59, [24–25](#).

⁵ [CTS](#) 8:215* ([CO](#) 31:149).

⁶ [WA](#) 3:102; citing [2 Sam 23:1](#).

⁷ Gwalther, *Der Psalter*, 20v.