

It is the intent of this study to show that the text of Psalm 22, especially verse 16, is indeed a Messianic prophecy. We began in Part 1 by showing that there is a problem between the Jewish and Christian understanding of the prophecy. We then compared the Jewish argument against the Christian claim that the psalm pictures the crucifixion to the Messiah. Now we'll begin to refute some of those claims. We'll then show that even if the rabbis are correct in regards to verse 16, it doesn't change the significance of the prophecy.

So let us review what we've seen so far -

- Christians believe Psalm 22 is a prophecy about Jesus' crucifixion whereas Judaism teaches that it's simply a story about David fleeing from Saul
 - The source of the Christian belief is the Septuagint
- Judaism teaches that the Christians 'tampered' with the text to derive the pierced hands and feet reading
 - Judaism relies on the Masoretic Text for their belief claiming it to be the *original* Hebrew
 - Yet we know there are no remaining copies of the *original* Hebrew

This is what we'll be discussing in Part 2 -

- The intent of the Masoretic Text
- Recent evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls
- Other Jewish arguments
- Either way - IT WORKS!

The Intent of the Masoretic Text

Since we've seen that there is no single authoritative Masoretic Text, and that (according to some Jewish web sites) the Masoretic texts that we have may have been tainted by "tradition" (either of the Masorites or the texts from which they copied), let's now take a look at the text in question. The following is the text of Psalm 22:17 as found in the JPS Tnakh which is based on the Leningrad Codex.

כִּי נִסְבְּבוּ כְּלָבִים עֵדֶת מְרַעִים נִהְקִיפוּ כְּאַרִי יְדֵי רַגְלֵי

In this passage, the word in question is the one highlighted above. In "the *original* Hebrew" the word is "ka'ari" which is translated into "like a lion". The word "lion" in Hebrew is "ari". This exact phrase – "ka'ari" is used in only one other place in the Tnakh, and that's Isaiah 38:13 where it reads in both Christian and Jewish bibles something similar to this –

^{KJV} **Isaiah 38:13** I reckoned till morning, *that*, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.

This might appear to be undeniable proof that the phrase "ka'ari" does indeed mean "as a lion" or "like a lion", but is it? In my article "The Masoretic Text and the Septuagint - an Introduction"¹, I explain how the Masorites wrote notes between the columns and in the margins of the copies they made from earlier texts of the Hebrew manuscripts. On the above mentioned verse, they wrote an interesting comment next to it stating that, though "ka'ari" is spelled the same here as it is in Psalm 22:16(17), it has a different meaning

¹ http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/LXX_vs_MT.htm

in the other verse, i.e. - in Psalm 22.² What they believed that other meaning might be we don't know, but we do know that "like a lion" was not it.

Besides the clear statement that the Masorites did not believe Psalm 22:16 to mean "like a lion", we find that some versions of the Masoretic text do not use the phrase "ka'ari", but instead use the word *kaaru* (כָּאָר) or *karu* (כָּרָו)³, neither of which mean "as a lion" or "like a lion". The only difference between kaari and kaaru is that the first ends with a yud (י) and the second ends with a vav (ו). These letters are similar in appearance thus leading one to believe that the masorite scribe may have simply elongated the *yud*, but considering the claim that the Masorites were so detailed and careful in performing their role, it's a stretch to believe that any of the Masorites would have penned a *vav* where there should have been a *yud*. Thus it is quite evident that at least some of the Masorites understood the correct meaning was certainly not "like a lion".

Another problem that is faced when attempting to use the rendering of the Masoretic Text is that it simply does not make sense. There is no verb in the phrase. Recognizing this problem, modern Jewish translators simply add a verb to the text in order for it to make a clear and meaningful sentence. Again reading from the JPS version of the text, and after striking out the words that are added to the text, we can see what I mean -

^{JPS} **Psalm 22:16** (22-17) For dogs have encompassed me; a company of evil-doers have inclosed me; like a lion, ~~they are at~~ my hands and my feet.

When you remove the added words, it reads "like a lion, my hands and my feet". The rabbis provide a number of reasons why the words are missing, yet in practically all English translations of this passage, they go ahead and add words in order to help it make sense. Here's an explanation of why they do this from the web site "Jews for Judaism" -

The correct interpretation of the verse must be based on the elliptical style of this particular psalm. The text should read, in effect: "Like a lion [they are gnawing at] my hands and my feet." Ellipsis (the omission of words) is an apt rhetorical device for a composition in which suffering and agony is described. A person in agony does not usually express his feelings in complete round sentences. Such a person is capable of exclaiming only the most critical words of his thoughts and feelings. In this case: "Like a lion . . . my hands and my feet!" Similarly, in verse 1 we find broken phrases rather than whole sentences: "Far from helping me . . . the words of my roaring."⁴

Though it may be true that a person in agony may not express his thoughts in full sentences, this could hardly be the case when David wrote this psalm. The entire psalm is beautifully woven by a man who is pondering his current plight, but who knows the outcome will be to his advantage. It's clear that at the time of its writing, David was far from being in agony.

A final proof that the Jewish understanding is incorrect came to light in 1997. That year, a Hebrew language scroll of portions of the Psalms was again discovered in the Nahal Hever area. This scroll, known as "5/6HevPsalms", is dated to the latter half of the 1st century CE - making it the most ancient Hebrew copy of the Psalms, predating the Masoretic text by nearly 1000 years.

² Delitzsch's Commentary on the Psalms – Vol. 1 (Translated from the German by Rev. Fancis Bolton); Edinburgh; pg. 317

³ <http://www.rejectionofpascalswager.net/pierce.html> - caption "Like a Lion: Still the Favored Reading"

⁴ <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/answers/jewish-polemics/crucifixion/what-is-the-translation-of-kaari-like-a-lion/>

The scroll contains a fragment of Psalm 22:16(17) that reads “They have pierced my hands and my feet”.⁵

In the fragment, it can be clearly seen that the word that that is translated “like a lion” in the majority of Masoretic texts (spelled כַּאֲרִי in the MT) is spelled כַּאֲרוּ in this fragment (with a *vav* instead of a *yud*).



The rabbis attribute this to a misspelling by the copyist, but that’s quite unlikely. In fact, you will notice that the next letter in the sequence

is in fact, a *yud* which is the first letter in the word “hand”. כַּאֲרוּ does not appear anywhere else in the Tanakh, and is likely an alternate spelling of the word “kur” (כּוּר - Strong’s 3564) which means “to dig” - as in “digging a ditch”. Of course, to dig a ditch, a person must take a shovel and “pierce” the ground.

Psalm 22:16 Not Mentioned by the NT Writers

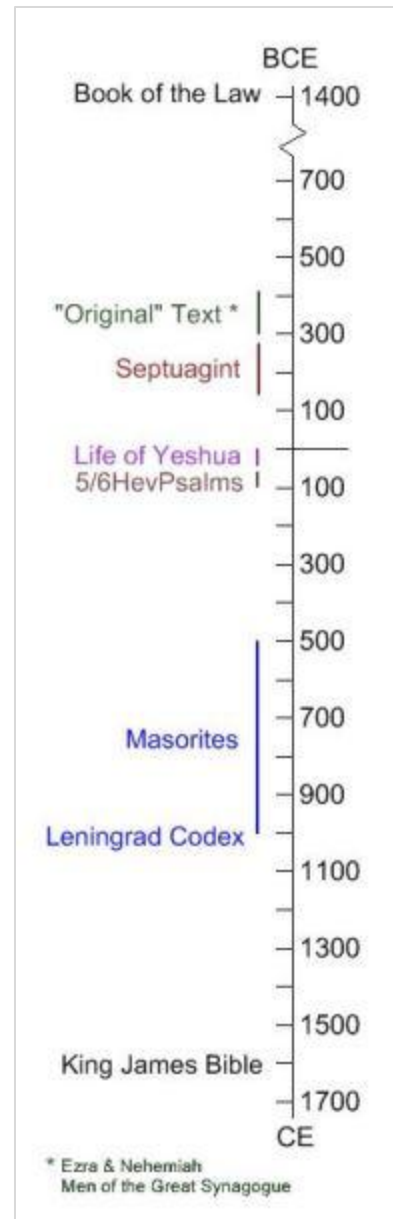
Another argument by the rabbis is that Psalm 22:16 is not directly mentioned by the New Testament writers in regards to Yeshua’s suffering which then proves that they (the NT writers) saw no messianic prophecy in it. This is an argument from silence. It’s clear that they saw other events surrounding his death as “prophetic’. For instance, all four gospel writers mention the parting of his garments, and two of them directly tie that event to the prophecy is Psalm 22⁶.

There are at least 12 prophecies in Psalm 22 that are considered “messianic”. Some could have had a partial fulfillment by David, but most could have only been fulfilled by Yeshua. Of those, six were fulfilled at His crucifixion, yet five of those were not directly referenced either. There again, the Jewish claim is an argument from silence and carries no weight.

Either Way Works!

I’ve supplied a significant amount of evidence showing that the rabbis have missed the point of Psalm 22:16, and that the Christian understanding of the psalm is in most ways correct. But what if the rabbis are right and the word “pierced” in the passage should indeed be “like a lion”? Will it really make any difference in the understanding of the scripture? No - the messianic understanding of the prophecy remains the same. Here’s why . . .

First - we don’t need that scripture to show that Yeshua was pierced. There is another scripture that shows that he was, though not necessarily in the hands and feet.



⁵ Abegg, Flint, Ulrich, Dead Sea Scrolls Bibles; pg 519

⁶ John 19:24, Matt. 27:35 in KJV

^{NKJ} **Zechariah 12:10** " And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

In fact, this verse is one the rabbis should actually be attacking because it does more damage to their view of Yeshua than does the prophecy that He would be crucified. Notice that in verse one, the speaker is YHVH, the God of Israel. The next few verses speak a lot about Judah, even stating that Judah will be the first of God's people to be brought back to the land at the end of the age. But then YHVH made a terrible mistake (at least in the eyes of the rabbis). He said that the House of Jacob will look upon ME whom they pierced, basically stating that the one who was pierced is YHVH himself.

Secondly, the literal understanding of the text was never fulfilled in the life of David. There is no scriptural record of anyone ripping away at David's hands and feet as if a lion were attacking him. Quite to the contrary, David was a man who took on the lions and the bears and killed them instead.⁷ Yeshua, on the other hand, would submit Himself to the lions - not real lions, by Roman soldiers who acted like a pride of enraged lions.

A lion is an animal with teeth that are designed for cutting and tearing. Though they don't generally puncture their prey with their canine teeth, they use them to hold their mouth around the prey's wind pipe, thus choking it to death⁸. It's teeth and paws are then used to tear the body apart in order to consume it.⁹

Yeshua's death did not start on the stake. If so, why did He die before the two men who were crucified with him? Surely, Yeshua was quite physically fit and it would stand to reason that He would last longer than most. Some credit his death to bleeding due to the nails in his hands and feet, but nailing a victim to the stake was a common practice of the Romans and thus the two convicts were likely nailed to their stake as well. Other commentaries say that He died as a result of the sword stuck into His side, but John records that event to take place after Yeshua was already dead.

John 19:30-34³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.³¹ Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath . . . , the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken . . .³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

So if being pierced with a sword was not the reason for his comparatively "quick death", what was?

Yeshua's death began many hours before He was crucified when Pilate turned Him over to the Roman soldiers to be scourged. When prophesying his death, Yeshua mentions the scourging three times¹⁰. Yet only mentions crucifixion once¹¹.

Roman scourging was very cruel. It was done with an instrument designed to remove the flesh, and because there was no limit under Roman law as to how many lashes could be administered, scourging often continued until shortly before the victim died. Such was the case with Yeshua.

One seldom mentioned word in the Psalm 22:16 passage is the word translated "inclosed", or as it is in the English Standard - "encircles".

⁷ 1 Samuel 17:34-37

⁸ Asphyxiation was often the cause of death for crucifixion victims - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion>

⁹ <http://www.lionlamb.us/lion/lionfact.html>

¹⁰ Matthew 20:19, Mark 10:34, Luke 18:33

¹¹ Matthew 20:19

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:16** For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet-

The Hebrew word behind “encircles” is “naqaph” (נָקַף Strong's 5362). It's primary meaning is “to strike” or “to strike off the skin”. This same word is used in the book of Job to describe a point in time after his death -

^{ESV} **Job 19:26** And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God . . .

Yeshua's flesh was “struck off” by Roman soldiers. He was beaten all through the night and up into the early morning hours. In all likelihood, He was beaten from all sides. That was how He was able to fulfill the prophecy -

^{NKJ} **Psalm 22:17** I can count all My bones. They look *and* stare at Me.

He was beaten from head to foot, even to the ends of His hands. Every bone in His body had to be visible. When the scouring was over, it would have been hard to recognize Him as a human. That's why the prophet Isaiah said -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 52:14** Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;

And that's why He - just as the prophet fortold - did not die from a sword wound¹² -

^{NKJ} **Psalm 22:20** Deliver Me from the sword, My precious *life* from the power of the dog.

It was not Yeshua's intent to die from a sword wound. His blood was spilled out bit by bit with each lash of the soldier. Yet even with his flesh all but ripped off his body, we was able to walk to the place where he was crucified, which in some estimations could have been a half mile away, carrying his own stake at least part of the way. He then endure six hours hanging out in the sun on that stake. Yeshua truly died as if a pride of lions had ripped him apart. In that way he fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22:16 no matter which way we interpret it.

Conclusion -

We have seen that the Jewish claims regarding Psalm 22:16 are weak at best. There is no “original” text from which they base their claim that the text should read “like a lion”. What's more, if it did read that way, the translators have to add a verb to the passage in order for it to make sense. We've also seen that the likelihood of the Masoretic Text having errors is much greater than that of Septuagint. Finally we've seen actual Hebrew text that shows that the text would not read the same way as what the rabbis claim.

Contrary to what the rabbis claim, Psalm 22 is prophetic . . . all of it - even to the last verse which reads -

^{NKJ} **Psalm 22:31** They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, That He has done *this*.

The word “done” in this passage is from the Hebrew word “asah” (אָשָׂה - Strong's 6213) which has as its primary meaning “to do, fashion, accomplish”. The word is in it's “qal” (perfect) form, meaning that something has been accomplished or finished. In effect, the last three verses of Psalm 22 indicate that all those who come to believe and serve Him will declare his righteousness and that He has performed all that was shown in the prophecy. After enduring hours of scourging, and while hanging from a stake, Yeshua knew he had satisfied the prophecy and thus cried out -

¹² In Isaiah 53:5, the word “wounded” is from 2490 “chalah” which means “profaned, defile, pollute, desecrate. Without hindsight, there would be no reason to translate the word as “wounded”.

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (^{NKJ} **Matt 27:46**)

This is an Aramaic rendition of the opening verse of Psalm 22. If indeed this Psalm is about King David fleeing from Saul, did David ever feel forsaken by God? David was a man who had already been anointed to be king of Israel. He had killed a giant with nothing more than a pebble. Even though he may have been experiencing a low point in his life, he knew that God had not, nor will not forsake his chosen one. After all, scripture points out -

^{NKJ} **Psalm 37:25** I have been young, and *now* am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

Yeshua was not forsaken by God . . . quite to the contrary. Yeshua knew the plan, and God had been with Him every step of the way. God worked it out so that everything that was prophesied did indeed take place. Therefore, Yeshua - even after a terrible beating and six hours on the stake - was confident that He would soon be resurrected and the next phase of the plan would then commence. It was with that confidence that He cried out so as to let all those who knew Him and the scriptures that spoke of Him rest confident that the scriptures had been fulfilled. With those words, He closed that portion of His life with the closing words of the Psalm and said -

^{NKJ} **John 19:30** So . . . "It is finished!"¹³

Shalom Alecheim

¹³ "Teleo" - Strong's 5055 - to bring to a close, to finish, complete, fulfill