

Psalm 22 and Messiah ben Ephraim

During the seven-year period preceding the coming of the son of David, iron beams will be brought low and loaded upon his neck until the Messiah's body is bent low. Then he will cry and weep, and his voice will rise to the very height of heaven, and he will say to God: Master of the universe, how much can my strength endure? How much can my spirit endure? How much my breath before it ceases? How much can my limbs suffer? Am I not flesh and blood?

It was because of the ordeal of the son of David that David wept, saying *My strength is dried up like a potsherd (Ps. 22:16)*. During the ordeal of the son of David, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to him: Ephraim, My true Messiah, long ago, ever since the six days of creation, thou didst take this ordeal upon thyself. At this moment, thy pain is like my pain . . .

At these words, the Messiah will reply: Now I am reconciled. The servant is content to be like his Master.

(*Pesikta Rabbati*, Piska 36.2, translated by William G. Braude, Yale University Press, pg. 680-681)

It is taught, moreover, that in the month of Nisan the Patriarchs will arise and say to the Messiah: Ephraim, our true Messiah, even though we are thy forbears, thou art greater than we because thou didst suffer for the iniquities of our children, and terrible ordeals befell thee . . . for the sake of Israel thou didst become a *laughingstock* and a *derision* among the nations of the earth; and didst sit in darkness, in thick darkness, and thine eyes saw no light, and thy skin cleaved to thy *bones*, and thy body was as dry as a piece of wood; and thine eyes grew dim from fasting, *and thy strength was dried up like a potsherd* – all these afflictions on account of the iniquities of our children . . .

(*Pesikta Rabbati* 37.1, translated by William G. Braude, Yale University Press, pg. 685-686)

Ephraim is a darling son to Me . . . My heart yearneth for him, in mercy I will have mercy upon him, saith the Lord (Jer. 31:20). Why does the verse speak twice of mercy: In mercy I will have mercy upon him? One mercy refers to the time when he will be shut up in prison, a time when the nations of the world will gnash their

teeth at him every day, wink their eyes at one another in derision of him, *nod their heads* at him in contempt, open wide their lips to guffaw, as is said *All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head (Ps. 22:8); My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my throat; and thou layest me in the dust of death (Ps. 22:16)*. Moreover, they will roar over him like lions, as is said *They open wide their mouth against me, as a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is become like wax; it is melted in mine inmost parts (Ps. 22:14-15)*. (*Pesikta Rabbati* 37.1, translated by William G. Braude, Yale University Press, pg. 686-687)

Psalm 22:17 (16)

Perhaps the most amazingly prophetic verse of Psalm 22 is:

*For dogs have encompassed me;
a company of evildoers have enclosed me:
they have pierced my hands and my feet.
(Ps. 22:17 (16))*

In his series ***Let's Get Biblical*** Tovia Singer has made the claim that Christians changed Ps. 22:16 (17) to read “they have pierced” rather than “like a lion”.

Psalm 22:17 (16) in Hebrew

Masoretic Text:

כי סבבוני כלבים עדת מרעים הקיפוני כארי ידי ורגלי:

Underlying Hebrew of the Septuagint:

כי סבבוני כלבים עדת מרעים הקיפוני כארו ידי ורגלי:

In the Hebrew the difference between these two readings is only one letter.

KARU (בארו) “They have pierced”
(כאר means “pierced” and the ו means “they”)

KARI (כארי) “Like a lion”
(כ means “like” and ארי means “lion”)

Psalm 22:17 (16) in BHS

If we look up this passage in the BHS (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). Here we find a footnote that reads:

“*pc Mss Edd* כָּאֵרוּ ,

2Mss Edd כָּרוּ *cf G(S)...*”

To translate this note into lay terms it says:

“A few manuscripts read KARU (כָּאֵרוּ) and two manuscripts read KARU (כָּרוּ) and the Greek Septuagint has [pierced]”

In other words while MOST Masoretic Text manuscripts read KARI (“like a lion”) SEVERAL read “they have pierced” (two possible spellings) as does the Greek Septuagint.

Psalm 22:17 (16) in the Aramaic Peshitta

“The Aramaic of the Peshitta has for “they have pierced my hands and my feet”

בזעו אידי ורגלי

Psalm 22:17 (16) in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Now let's look at the oldest extant Hebrew copy of this Psalm which was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. If we look in THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS BIBLE under Psalm 22 on pages 518-519 we read:

“They have pierced my hands and my feet.”

We are directed to footnote 41 which says:

“5/6HevPs MT(mss) LXX. Like a lion are MT.”

In layman's terms this note means:

In the Dead Sea Scroll manuscript designated “5/6HevPs”, some Masoretic Text manuscripts and the Septuagint the reading is “they have pierced” while most Masoretic Text manuscripts read “like a lion are”.

A header above this section of Psalm 22 reads:

“Psalm 22 is a favorite among Christians since it is often linked in the New Testament with the suffering and death of Jesus. A well-known and controversial reading is found in verse 16, where the Masoretic Text reads “Like a lion are my hands and feet,” whereas the Septuagint has “They have pierced my hands and feet.” Among the scrolls the reading in question is found only in the Psalms scroll found at Nahal Hever (abbreviated 5/6HevPs), which reads “They have pierced my hands and my feet”!”

Psalm 22:17 (16) Grammar

The grammar does not work for “like a lion” since the phrase would lack a verb. Many insert additional words to attempt to *make* the text read “Like a lion [they are at] my hands and my feet”. The understood verb of being does not work here because “Like a lion are my hand and my feet” makes about as much sense as “Like a pizza are my hands and my feet”

Conclusion

OK lets review the facts:

1. Only the Masoretic Text (which originated in the 9th Century CE) has “like a lion” and even then some copies have “they have pierced”.
2. ALL other versions INCLUDING the Greek Septuagint and Aramaic Peshitta Tanak read “they have pierced”.
3. The error itself is an accidental scribal error and NOT an intentional change.
4. By far the OLDEST Hebrew copy of the Psalm from the Dead Sea Scrolls reads “they have pierced”
5. The reading “like a lion” does not fit the grammar.
6. Several copies and versions from BEFORE the life of Yeshua have “they have pierced” and NO copy or version prior to the 9th century CE has “like a lion.”

Tovia Singer’s claims, once again, are without merit. The reading “they have pierced” existed BEFORE Christianity existed, the scribal error in question was clearly NOT intentional and the textual evidence points STRONGLY to “they have pierced” as the original reading.

The truth is that Psalm 22 is a prophecy of the suffering of Messiah and verse 17(16) speaks specifically of the crucifixion of Messiah, having his hands and his feet pierced, pointing clearly to Yeshua as having fulfilled this amazingly clear prophecy.

