

PSALMS 22 - "NAILING" AN ALLEGED CRUCIFIXION SCENARIO¹

I. INTRODUCTION

A casual reading of Psalms 22, either in the Hebrew or in an accurate translation from the Hebrew, is not likely to raise many eyebrows or draw much attention as having some special and unique significance to Christianity. It is only when one reads the common Christian translations of this psalm (e.g., KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, and RSV, to name just a few) that the reasons for its being dubbed the "Crucifixion Psalm" by Christians start to surface. This, of course, makes the 22nd chapter in the Book of Psalms an important element in the portfolio of the Christian missionary. In fact, some Christian sources lay claim to more than 20 passages in Psalms 22 as "messianic prophecies" (i.e., "proof texts") that were allegedly "fulfilled" by Jesus.²

This article provides a closer look at the four "proof texts" from Psalms 22 that are most commonly used by missionaries. For each of these, the Christian perspective is contrasted with the Jewish perspective by analyzing the respective Hebrew texts. The analysis demonstrates that Psalms 22 is an historic account by its author, King David, rather than "messianic text" that foretells the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus.

II. COMPARISON OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Side-by-side renditions of key verses in Psalms 22 are displayed in Table II-1. The King James Version (KJV) renditions also show references to key passages in the New Testament, where the respective portions of this psalm are cross-referenced. [The references are found in the New American Standard Bible (NASB), but the corresponding passages, quoted below the table, are quoted from the KJV.]

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter ב is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ג is transliterated as "h"
 - The letter ד is transliterated as "ch"
 - The letter ט is transliterated as "k"
 - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
 - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ נִשְׁבֵּט) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
 - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **daGESH** (emphasis)

² For example, *Jesus is the Messiah: The Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled By Jesus Christ Ordered by Category* - <http://contenderministries.org/prophecy/jesuss Messiah2.php>

Table II-1 – Psalms 22:1-2[1], 17[16], 19[18]³

King James Version Translation		Jewish Translation from the Hebrew		Hebrew Text	
Psalms 22				תהילים כב	
1	[To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.] My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [why art thou so] far from helping me, [and from] the words of my roaring? ⁽ⁱ⁾	1	For the conductor, on the <i>Ayelet haShahar</i> , a Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? [You are] so far from my salvation, from the words of my loud moaning?	א	לְמַנְצַח עַל־אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד :
16	For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.	17	For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers encompassed me; like a lion [they are at] my hands and my feet.	יז	כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עַד־תַּת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפּוּנִי כְּאַרְיֵה : דִּי וְרָגְלִי :
18	They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	19	They divide my garments among themselves, and cast lots for my raiment.	יט	יַחֲלִקוּ בְּגָדֵי לְהֵם וְעַל־לְבוּשֵׁי יַפִּילוּ גּוֹרֵל :
22	I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	23	I will declare Your Name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation will I praise You.	כג	אֶסְפְּרָה שְׁמֶךָ לְאַחֵי בְּתוֹךְ קְהַל אֲהַלְלֶךָ :

(i) Matthew 27:46(KJV) - And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

Mark 15:34(KJV) - And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, Lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

(ii) Matthew 27:35(KJV) - And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

John 19:23-24(KJV) - (23) Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also [his] coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. (24) They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

(iii) Hebrews 2:12(KJV) - Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

III. OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON PSALMS 22

The Church has long regarded Psalms 22 as a prophetic messianic psalm that describes the agony of the Passion (Psalms 22:2[1]), the Crucifixion (Psalms 22:17[16]), and the Resurrection (Psalms 22:23[22]) of Jesus, the Messiah of

³ The notation when verse numbers differ between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian "Old Testament", as they do in Psalms 22, shows the verse number in the Hebrew Bible followed by the verse number in the Christian "Old Testament" in brackets. Example: Psalms 22:17[16].

Christianity. These passages are "quoted" in the New Testament as "evidence" of the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies allegedly contained in this psalm.

Perhaps the most famous "quote" from this psalm found in the New Testament is its opening verse, which is used by the authors of the Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 27:46) and Mark (Mark 15:34) as the passionate statement of the crucified Jesus and his last words before dying on the cross. The authors of the Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 27:35) and John (John 19:24), use verse 19[18] in the "Crucifixion narrative"; while the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 2:12) uses verse 23[22] to explain that Jesus needed to suffer in order to triumph, celebrate, and publish God's gracious dealings upon his resurrection.

These passages are revisited in the analysis that follows. It is interesting to note that one of the most important verses from the Christian perspective, Psalms 22:17[16], is not cited by any of the New Testament authors. Their silence on this verse suggests that this verse, in the form it was known to them, did not have any Christological significance such as is found today in most Christian translations.

Only a summary of the general Christian perspective is presented here. Standard Christian sources, such as commentaries by Matthew Henry (MH) and Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown (JF&B), provide detailed verse-by-verse Christian interpretations of Psalms 22, which are beyond the scope of this essay.

IV. OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON PSALMS 22

As was done with the Christian perspective, only a summary of the general Jewish interpretation is presented. A detailed verse-by-verse analysis and commentary is beyond the scope of this essay.

There are several Jewish perspectives on this psalm, all of which agree that King David composed it and is the "voice" throughout, and that it is historical, not messianic. However, they differ on the particulars. The view that is the most consistent with the plain reading of this psalm holds that it is David's own personal story, in which he describes his own pain, anguish, and longing during those times when he was a fugitive from his enemies, believing that, at times, God had not heeded his pleas for intervention.

He pleads with God to come to his aid since his persecutors are relentlessly pursuing him in their zeal to dispossess him of his kingdom and mantle of royalty. He uses animal motifs of lions, dogs, and bulls/bison, to describe his adversaries, which he also employs on other occasions (e.g., Psalms 17:11,12, 35:17, 59:2-7,15).

Thankful for God's help in the past and confident of His continued support, David concludes with his expression of gratitude praise.

V. THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE VIS-À-VIS THE HEBREW TEXT ON KEY VERSES

A comparison of the general Christian and Jewish perspectives on Psalms 22 indicates that both cannot be simultaneously valid interpretations. The question is, “Which of these two views is consistent with the Hebrew Bible (and Israel’s history)?” The analysis that follows focuses on the key verses being “quoted” in the New Testament.

A. Psalms 22:2[1]

As noted earlier, this verse is used in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark, where it appears as follows:

Matthew 27:46(KJV) - And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Mark 15:34(KJV) – And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

These two verses are now compared; first against each other, then, against the Hebrew text and, finally, against the context of the original verse.

1. Comparing Matthew 27:46 with Mark 15:34

The variations between the two renditions in the Gospels are rather minor, with perhaps, *Eli* vs. *Eloi*, showing the most variance. This is, however, only a superficial problem since:

- Some of the old manuscripts have either *Eli* or *Eloi* or a mix in both sources
- This is a transliterated word from the Hebrew (or Aramaic), and transliteration is inherently subject to variation

2. Comparing Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34 with Psalms 22:2

The transliterated phrases in the Gospels are, "... *Eli/Eloi, Eli/Eloi, lama sabachthani* ...". The Hebrew text of the corresponding phrase in Psalms 22:2 reads, **אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי** (transliterated as *eli, eli, lama azavTani*). The question is: "Does *sabachTani* have the same meaning as **עֲזַבְתָּנִי** (*azavTani*)?"

The conjugated verb **עֲזַבְתָּנִי** derives from the root verb **עָזַב** (*Ayin-Zayin-VET*), commonly used in the Hebrew Bible in the context of [to] abandon, or [to] forsake, or [to] leave. The word *sabachTani* exists neither in Hebrew nor in Aramaic. There are two possibilities here:

- The closest Hebrew/Aramaic term to *sabachTani* would be **זָבַחְתָּנִי** (*z^evahTani*), a conjugated verb that derives from the root verb **זָבַח** (*Zayin-VET-HET*), used in the

Hebrew Bible in the context of **[to] sacrifice**, or **[to] slaughter [a sacrificial animal]**, but which never appears in this form in the Hebrew Bible. Making this association would render this phrase as **"My God, My God, why have you slaughtered me?"** Clearly, the two terms and, therefore the phrases, are not equivalent. If this identification is correct then one could speculate that using **sabachtani** in the two Gospels was designed ostensibly to depict the scene of the Passion as a sacrificial offering.

- The *Targum Yonatan*, an ancient interpretive translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Aramaic vernacular, has אֱלִי אֱלִי מְטוּל מַה שְׁבַקְתָּנִי (transliterated as **ELI, ELI, m^eTUL MAH sh^evaqtani**). The phrase מְטוּל מַה (**m^eTUL MAH**) is interchangeable with the word לָמָה\לָמָה (**lAMAH**), **why**. The conjugated verb שְׁבַקְתָּנִי derives from the Aramaic root verb שְׁבַח (**SHIN-VET-QOF**), **[to] leave**, or **[to] forsake**. Because the Greek language does not have the "sh" sound, the letter שְׁ (**SHIN**) is usually transliterated as an "s". Moreover, the use of "ch" for the letter ק (**QOF**) is plausible, since the actual alphabetic cognate in the Greek language for the letter ק – the **koppa**, not the **K (kappa)** – had been lost centuries earlier, and the letter **X (chi)** was used here instead. Given these facts, one could conclude that, even though the way the term appears in the Greek text is not precise or consistent in its transliteration from Aramaic, the Aramaic שְׁבַקְתָּנִי could have become **sabachtani** in the process of transliteration.

The conclusion drawn from the former view does not necessarily survive under the latter perspective.

However, placing this verse into the mouth of a dying Jesus on the cross creates more theological difficulties for the Christian paradigm than it solves. For example, King David makes the following statement (as quoted from the KJV):

Psalms 37:25(KJV) - I have been young, and [now] am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

This would imply that Jesus was not righteous, i.e., a sinner, since he complained to God about being forsaken. (Christians will argue that, when Jesus was on the cross he, as a "sin sacrifice" by God, carried their sins [2Corinthians 5:21] and was, therefore, forsaken. There are serious flaws in this logic, and these will be dealt with in several future articles.)

Some other issues concerning the Christian claims about Psalms 22:2[1] are:

- **To whom is Jesus actually complaining: "My God, My God [why art thou so] far from helping me, [and from] the words of my roaring?"?**
- **Why, as one of the three divine co-equal components of Christianity's triune godhead, would Jesus be complaining to another of its components?**
- **How is it possible that God (the Father), the first component in the Trinity, cannot hear the cries of God (the Son), the second component in the Trinity?**
- **How is it possible that an omniscient God cannot understand His own predicament?**

Finally, the four Gospel writers do not agree on the last words of Jesus as he was dying on the cross:

Matthew 27:46(KJV) - And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Mark 15:34(KJV) - And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?** which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Luke 23:46(KJV) - And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

John 19:30(KJV) - When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished:** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

In view of these issues, it is evident that putting the words of Psalms 22:1 of the Christian "Old Testament" into the mouth of a dying Jesus on the cross does not work in favor of the Christian perspective.

3. The Correct Context of Psalms 22:2[1]

King David, feeling that he has been abandoned by God, who was his strength, his shield, and who heard his supplications and intervened on his behalf in the past, lets out this cry of desperation as he is grieved that God is not listening to his prayers this time.

B. Psalms 22:17[16]

This is, perhaps, one of the verses from the Christian "Old Testament" most frequently referenced by Christian missionaries when claiming that the crucifixion of Jesus was foretold. Yet, as was noted above, the authors of the New Testament are silent on this verse, even though it is such an important component in the missionary's portfolio. A comparison of the two translations reveals a major discrepancy in the respective renditions of the term **כַּאֲרִי** (*ka'ari*). The typical Jewish rendition of this term is **like a lion**; while the KJV (typical of most Christian translations) has **they pierced**. *Which one of the two is the correct translation?*

A word study on the Hebrew term **כַּאֲרִי** helps answer this question. For simplicity, the word study includes only cases where the same form of the term appears, i.e., excluding other forms of the root noun **אֲרִי** (*ari*) in the singular and plural, and combinations with various prepositions other than that which occurs here [the **-כַּ** {or **-כֵּ**} (*ka-*) is the Hebrew preposition equivalent to **like**, or **as**]. In addition to the application at Psalms 22:17[16], three other instances of **כַּאֲרִי** are present in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are shown in Table V.B-1 below, along with their respective KJV translations. Also included in the word study is a single instance of the term **כַּאֲרִי**

(*v^echa'ari*), which is the equivalent of כָּאַרִי with the conjunction וְ (v^e-), and, added to it. This term is included in Table V.B-1 for completeness, since it contains the original term כָּאַרִי, though it is not critical for illustrating the point to be made here.

Table V.B-1 – KJV “Old Testament” renditions of כָּאַרִי

Reference	Hebrew word	KJV rendition	Comment
Psalms 22:17[16]	כָּאַרִי	they pierced	Incorrect
Numbers 24:9	כָּאַרִי	like a lion	Correct
Isaiah 38:13	כָּאַרִי	like a lion	Correct
Ezekiel 22:25	כָּאַרִי	like a lion	Correct
Numbers 23:24	וְכַאֲרִי	and ... as a young lion	Correct

It appears that the KJV translators had a special reason for rendering the term כָּאַרִי at Psalms 22:17[16] differently. *Why did the KJV translate the Hebrew term כָּאַרִי as “they pierced” only at Psalms 22:17[16]?*

Could there be a connection between the Hebrew term כָּאַרִי and a Hebrew verb that describes the act of piercing? The word אַרִי, **a lion**, is related to another word for **a lion**, אַרְיָה (*aryeh*); both are used in the Hebrew Bible. Several verbs are used in the Hebrew Bible to describe an act of piercing: דָּקַר (*daqar*; e.g., Zechariah 12:10), חָדַר (*hadar*; e.g., Ezekiel 21:19), נָקַב (*naqav*; e.g., Habakkuk 3:14), פָּלַח (*palah*; e.g., Job 16:13), and רָצַע (*ratsa*; e.g., Exodus 21:6). Knowledge of Hebrew is not required to recognize that none of these verbs resembles any of the terms כָּאַרִי, אַרִי, or אַרְיָה.

Could there be another linguistic explanation? Two fragments containing Psalms 22:17[16] were discovered among the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (DSS). In the first fragment, which was found at **Qumran (4QPs-f)**, known as the Qumran MS), the word in question is not preserved. In the second fragment, found at **Nahal Hever [HHev/Se 4 (Ps)]**, known as the Bar Kochba MS), the word is visible. The fragment **HHev/Se 4 (Ps)** shows the Hebrew letters כ (KAF), א (Alef), ר (RESH), and what appears to be a somewhat elongated letter י (YOD), which some perceive to be the letter ו (VAV). Thus, the reading of this word would be either כַּאֲרִי (*ka'ari*) or כַּאֲרוֹ (*ka'aru*), respectively, depending on what the last letter is. Although the latter of these two forms of the term, namely, כַּאֲרוֹ, has been the center of much controversy, the focus of which is the claim by Christian apologists that the letter א in this word is silent, the linguistic fact is that no three-letter root verb exists in the Hebrew language, Biblical or Modern, with a silent letter א in the middle position of the root, and conjugated in this fashion (3rd-person, plural masculine gender,

past tense), that has the meaning of **they pierced**, as is rendered in most Christian translations.

Sidebar Note: An image of this fragment is shown in the Appendix to this article. The source of this image, in which the line with the word in question was "enhanced" for the purpose of that particular publication, is an article by Tim Hegg, a Christian apologist, titled, *Psalm 22:16 – "like a lion" or "they pierced"?*⁴ The reader should be cautioned that the Hebrew linguistic analysis in the article contains serious flaws. For example, the fragment also appears to show the next word as being misspelled, having an extra letter ה (HEH) attached at the end, which makes no grammatical sense. The author shows this incorrect spelling in the text, but in a later segment in which he compares the Masoretic Text against the text from *HHev/Se 4 (Ps)*, he drops the extra letter ה. Considering the uneven lettering, both in terms of letter sizes as well as inter- and intra-word spacing, what appears to be the extra letter ה following the word ידִי, is actually consistent with the first two letters of the Hebrew word that follows it (ורגלִי), namely, the letter ו (VAV) followed by the letter ר (RESH); the rest of the letters in the word are not visible in the fragment. Moreover, Hegg's analysis does not include a relative size comparison of the letters י (YOD) and ו in the other words that appear on the fragment. A quick visual examination of these letters in the fragment shows that their respective sizes, their vertical lengths in particular, as well as their positions relative to a line of text, are not uniform and they appear rather similar in size, even equal at times, in several instances.

Without the letter א, and using, for the moment, the argument that the last letter [the elongated letter י] is the letter ו, the word would be כָּרוּ (karu), for which the Hebrew root verb is כָּרָה (KOF-RESH-HEH), [to] dig [in dirt], such as digging a ditch (e.g., Psalms 57:7). In other words, כָּרוּ has the meaning [they] dug [in dirt]. This verb is *never* used in the context of **piercing**, either literally or metaphorically, in any of its 15 applications in the Hebrew Bible.

What could cause such a variation between the two terms כָּאָרוּ and כָּאָרִי, i.e., with an elongated letter י that resembles the letter ו? Since the word כָּאָרוּ does not exist in the Hebrew language, the most plausible explanation is that such discrepancy is simply a case of scribal variation (or error).

Another possibility, one that has been alleged by Christian missionaries, is **textual revisionism** by the Masoretes, who added vowels and melodic trope markings to the Hebrew Bible around the 10th century C.E., i.e., the claim is that the Masoretes changed the original כָּאָרוּ to the current כָּאָרִי in order to remove any resemblance to a crucifixion scenario. Given the strict prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible concerning any tampering with its text (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:6), and the fact that the term כָּאָרוּ does not exist in the Hebrew language, this is a rather preposterous claim regarding an unlikely action by the trained scribes.

⁴ The article is available at - <http://www.wholebible.com/PdfLibrary/Ps22.16.pdf>

The dating of the *Nahal Hever* fragment⁵ suggests that the discrepancy could be the result of exactly the reverse of the previous claim. Namely, it could be the product of an attempt by second century CE (early) Christians to alter the original כָּאֲרִי to read כָּאֲרוּ, thereby making it appear like the verb כָּרַוּ, **they dug**. This would have accomplished the effect of aligning the word with the events of the early first century CE. It is also interesting to note that in the **LXX** (the Christian translation into Greek of the Hebrew Bible), where this verse is numbered as Psalms 21:17, the reading is **ωρυξαν (oruksan)**, which stems from the root **ορύσσω (orusso)**, **to dig**, as in **[to] dig a trench**. Liddell & Scott (Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*) do not list a meaning of **pierce** for this word, and the identical usages occur only in early Christian renditions (Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon of the Greek Testament*). This **LXX** reading could possibly stem from a presumed, though non-existent, Hebrew reading (which makes no sense in context) of כָּרַוּ [i.e., without the letter א - not the reading כָּאֲרוּ]. As noted above, the Hebrew word כָּרַוּ means **[they] dug [in dirt]**, and it is never used in the Hebrew Bible with the context of **piercing**.

A final clue is contained within the New Testament itself. The authors of the New Testament are silent on Psalms 22:17[16], a verse deemed so central to Christianity in the description of the crucifixion itself. Given its significance to the Church, the question is: "*Why is the New Testament silent on this verse?*"

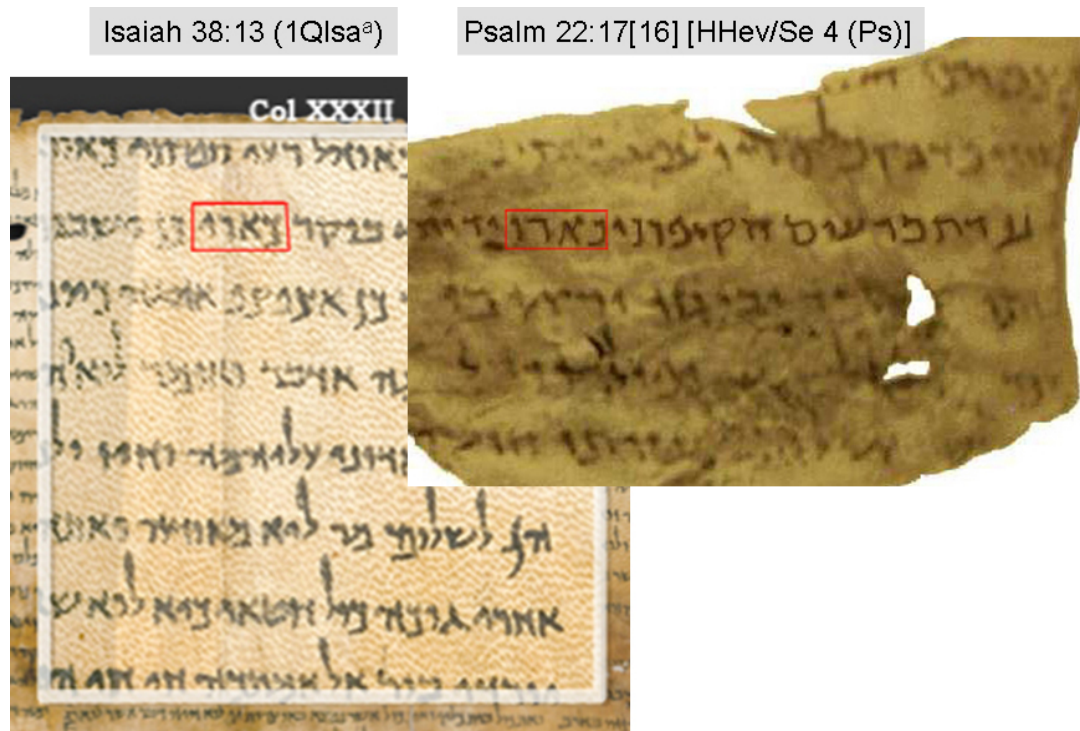
One possible answer is that none of the authors of the four Gospels, all of which contain a narrative of the crucifixion, was aware of this verse. That answer is not likely, however, since all of them referenced other parts of this psalm. Another possibility is that none of the authors saw this verse as being significant, or even relevant, to their respective crucifixion narratives. But this answer would be inconsistent with the important role the verse plays in the Christian perspective.

Perhaps the most likely answer is that the common Christian rendition, **they pierced** in the "Old Testament", came *after* the New Testament was written, i.e., the authors of the New Testament were unaware of a **future revision** of Psalms 22:17[16], in which the Church attempted to create a better fit with the crucifixion narrative. There was no need to mistranslate the term כָּאֲרִי in Numbers 23:24, 24:9, Isaiah 38:13, and Ezekiel 22:25, since these passages, unlike Psalms 22:17[16], had no Christological value to the Church, and could not help improve the fit into the Hebrew Bible of any component of Christian theology.

⁵ The *Nahal Hever* papyri are dated as late as the second century CE according to DSS scholars and researchers; e.g. G. Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 29.

The knockout punch to the Christian claim about this verse is delivered by the *Isaiah A Scroll (1QIsa^a)*,⁶ dated to the 4th century BCE),⁷ an almost completely preserved scroll that closes the case on the claim that כָּאֲרִי means “**they pierced**”. Recall that Table V.B-1 shows the word כָּאֲרִי appearing at Isaiah 38:13. Figure V.B-1 below displays a side-by-side comparison of the word כָּאֲרִי (inscribed in a red box) as it appears in both Dead Sea Scroll sources – in the (enhanced line in the) *HHev/Se 4 (Ps)* fragment on the right and in the (“raw”) *1QIsa^a* Isaiah A Scroll on the left. The two words are almost identically scribed (note the last letter ך on the left. The KJV renders these two words as **they pierced** and **like a lion**, respectively.

Figure V.B-1 – The word כָּאֲרִי as it appears in two Dead Sea Scrolls sources



This should remove any doubt about the mistranslation “**they pierced**” in the KJV and many other Christian Bibles.

The correct context of this verse is that it describes, in metaphorical terms, enemies surrounding their target, just like vicious dogs and lions surround their prey before they go in for the “kill”. This, again, is consistent with King David’s experiences throughout his life, being the targets of plots to either kill him or to disown him of his kingdom.

⁶ The Great Isaiah Scroll - http://www.imj.org.il/shrine_center/Isaiah_Scrolling/index.html

⁷ Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 24, Fortress Press (1999)

C. Psalms 22:19[18]

The author of the Gospel of John points to this verse as being a prophecy that became fulfilled when Jesus was on the cross:

John 19:23-24(KJV) – (23) Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also [his] coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. (24) They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

The previous verse, Psalms 22:18[17], is critical to obtaining a correct understanding of the true context of this verse:

Psalms 22:18 - I can count all my bones. They look and stare at me.

Psalms 22:17(KJV) - I may tell all my bones: they look [and] stare upon me.

As can be seen from the above quotes, Psalms 22:18[17] describes the subject of v. 19[18] as counting his bones while those who are taking his garments look on and gloat. This starving man is so skinny that his bones are visible and can be counted. The "voice" here is still King David's, as it is throughout the psalm, and he uses the act of taking and dividing his garments as a metaphorical reference to the desires of his enemies to take away his mantle of royalty and make it their own.

D. Psalms 22:23[22]

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews "quotes" this verse at Hebrews 2:12 to help explain why Jesus needed to suffer for humanity. However, the one who speaks here is the same person that speaks throughout the psalm, including Psalms 22:7[6], where he refers to himself as being a worm:

Psalms 22:7[6] - But I am a worm, and not a man; a reproach of man and despised by the people.

In the Christian scenario, it would be Jesus calling himself a worm.

This reference to a worm as a metaphor for people is not unique in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah likens the Jewish people to a worm:

Isaiah 41:14 - Fear not, O worm of Jacob, the number of Israel; "I have helped you," says the Lord, and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Bildad the Shuhite, one of Job's friends, refers to man as a worm:

Job 25:6 - How much less, man, who is a worm, and the son of man, who is a maggot!"

In Psalms 22:7[6], King David uses this metaphor as he describes the plight of his own people. *Does the worm metaphor fit Jesus? Would anyone, other*

than pagans, some of whom worship worms, use this metaphor to describe a divine being?

The theme in Psalms 22:23[22] is the praising of God's name for being so good and benevolent, a theme that is often used by King David in his other psalms (e.g., Psalms 9:3, 54:8, 61:9, 69:31).

VI. Summary

The linguistic analysis and thematic descriptions presented in this article have demonstrated and affirmed the validity of the Jewish perspective of Psalms 22, and that the standard Christian interpretation is based on mistranslations and a disregard of the context of the psalm.

The Jewish perspective that this psalm is historical is based on the fact that its author, King David, who is also the “voice” throughout it, describes events and scenarios from his personal life, and makes certain proclamations based on these experiences.

The Christian perspective appears to have been fashioned with hindsight after the New Testament was written, i.e., knowing what the narratives in the New Testament have described and implementing some editorial enhancements in its translations, the text of Psalms 22 was transformed into a template for the prophetic description of the crucifixion that would take place a millennium after these words were recorded. The silence of the New Testament on this psalm’s central verse to the Christian crucifixion scenario, Psalms 22:17[16], lends credence to this conclusion.

APPENDIX

A-1. The Dead Sea Scrolls Fragment HHevSe4Ps



[Source: Tim Hegg, *Psalm 22:16 – "like a lion" or "they pierced"?* - <http://www.wholebible.com/PdfLibrary/Ps22.16.pdf>.]

A-2. Hebrew text of Psalms 22:15-20[14-19] {תהילים כב, טו: כ}

The portion included in *HHevSe4Ps* is shown in highlighted Form.

כמים נשפכתי והתפרדו כל
עצמותי היה לבי כדונג נמס בתוך מעי יבש כחרש כחי
ולשוני מדבק מלקוחי ולעפר מות תשפתי כי סבבוני
כלבים עדת מרעים הקיפוני כארי ידי ורגלי אספר
כל עצמותי המה יביטו יראו-בי יחלקו
בגדי להם ועל לבושי יפילו גורל ואתה יהוה
אל תרחק אילותי לעזרתי חושה