

# LION HANDS

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Once upon a time there was a very handsome young prince. His father, the king, ruled his kingdom with love, mercy, justice and righteousness, but there were many people in the realm that did not accept his rule and rebelled against him. The king was hard pressed as to what to do. Any other monarch would have squashed the rebellion by killing all the rebels, but the king loved all his people and did not want to destroy them.

The prince loved his father dearly and also the people. He devised a plan and spoke of it to his father for approval. Upon hearing it the father gasped in shock and sadness. The son spoke of an idea to appeal to the *hearts* of the rebels. The son reasoned that only something that could *pierce* their hearts would ever have a possibility of turning the rebels back to the king. The prince would take upon himself the punishment of death for all the rebels, thus revealing his heart for them and freeing them from punishment, to be able to return to the king. The prince said that if they could understand that the king had given up his most precious possession for them to be forgiven of their rebellion, they would come to see the great love that the king and the prince had for them, and they would return in humility. And so the two of them set out to do just that.

Fairy tale? Hardly! Just the opposite. A divine tale of love that will take eternity to comprehend and experience. You can read about it in the Book. It's all there—God's love for us; our perverse, stubborn and rebellious hearts, and the sacrifice that He paid to win back our hearts, that we might return to Him and receive His gracious forgiveness and life-giving love. Sadly, though, there have been rebels who have rejected what He and His Son have done for them. Some have even twisted and distorted His Word, causing many to pass over aspects of the Story and think nothing of it. One such place is Psalm 22:17:<sup>1</sup>

'For dogs have compassed me; A company of evil doers have inclosed (sic) me; *Like a lion*, they are at my hands and my feet.'<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 22 is about a righteous man being brutally murdered (vv. 10-11, 15-16, 20, 23) at the hands of rebels (vv. 13-14, 17-18), who was seemingly forsaken by God (vv. 2-3, 7-9). Yet, the man's trust in God is so strong (vv. 10-11, 20-22) that he believes that God will raise him back to life so that he may declare God's love and righteousness to Israel and the nations (23-32).

I've italicized '*Like a lion*' above because it's one word in Hebrew and on this word hinges the proper meaning of the verse that intentionally has been hidden from us. As it traditionally stands we might think that the 'company of evil doers' were 'like a lion' or had the power and fury of a lion, at the man's hands

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew Bibles list it as v. 17; Christian Bibles have it as v. 16. The reason for the difference is because the Hebrew Bibles count the heading, 'For the leader...' or 'For the director of music,' in the Psalms as verse one. The Christian rendering for verse one begins with, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Because of this it's common for the numbering of the verses 'to be off' by one verse in the Psalms.

<sup>2</sup> תורה וכתובים (Torah, Nivi'im and Kituvim: The Law, Prophets and Writings): *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, thirteenth printing, 1982), p. 1572. Note well: there is no alternate reading given in the margin, yet, there is an alternate rendering. The Masoretic texts were written about 600–1000 AD).

and feet, but what could that mean? Were they slapping his hands and his feet? Were they biting his hands and his feet? Were they growling at his hands and his feet? It's a very awkward sentence in Hebrew and a strange translation in English. The words, '**they are at**' have been added, that is to say they are not in Hebrew ('Like a lion, **they are at** my hands and my feet'). Literally, it reads, '*Like a lion my hands and my feet.*'

Is one to think that the man, who is surrounded by those evil men, has the strength of a lion in his hands and his feet? Lion hands? This can hardly be what King David meant for one who was obviously dying. Reading the two previous verses brings out that the man has absolutely no strength, let alone the strength of a lion:

'I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd<sup>3</sup> and my tongue cleaves to my jaws. And You lay me in the dust of death.'<sup>4</sup> (Hebrew, Psalm 22:15-16)

There is an alternate translation in the Septuagint, the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek about 280–250 BC. This was made for Jews living outside the Land of Israel whose Hebrew was poor or non-existent. Because of Alexander the Great (330 BC), Greek was the *lingua franca* of the day. The Jewish sages who wrote the Septuagint translated the Hebrew word they found in Psalm 22:17 (that traditionally stands as 'like a lion') with a Greek word that means, '**they pierced.**'<sup>5</sup> The Greek word those ancient Jewish sages used was ωρουσαν<sup>6</sup> *oh'rooks'sahn*. It comes from the verb ορουσσω *oh'roos'so*, which means to 'dig, or excavate.'<sup>7</sup>

Those Jewish men knew the Hebrew text as, '**They pierced my hands and my feet,**'<sup>8</sup> for them to use that Greek word. Those Jewish scholars didn't translate it as 'like a lion' because they saw a *vav* as the last Hebrew letter of the word, not a *yod*. This dramatically clashes with the traditional Jewish text of today, but '*They pierced my hands and my feet*' is how the ancient Jewish people understood Psalm 22:17 more than 250 years before the Prince had His hands and feet pierced to a tree in Jerusalem—for you and me.

## *The Pierced Prince*

With the 'clipping short' of one Hebrew letter, 'They pierced' was changed to 'Like a lion.' We see this concept in English with letters that, with the 'clipping off' of *part* of the letter, become another letter. The capital English letter G clipped becomes a C; the E an F; and the R turns into a P; etc. In terms of how this effects a word, some permutations are; Gap to Cap; Rat to Pat; and Eat to Fat. The Hebrew letters in question are the *vav* (ו) a straight up and down line, and the *yod* (י) a straight up and down line about half the size of a *vav*. There's no difference between the two of them except for their length. The *vav* looks like a

<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 25th printing, 1976), p. 877. A potsherd is 'a fragment of an earthen vessel.' It's figuratively used of 'that which is very dry.' This parallels the man's tongue cleaving to his jaws, as one would expect when extremely thirsty or dehydrated.

<sup>4</sup> These two verses, along with v. 17, offer a powerful description of what one would experience if they were being crucified. The whole Psalm is about the Prince being crucified. Vv. 7-9, 13-14 and 17-18 are almost a word for word account of what will happen to the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6) in Mt. 27:35, 39-43 and Mark 15:24, 29-32, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, sixth printing, February, 1997), p. 710.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Wesley J. Perschbacher, Editor, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1990), p. 297. 'To dig, excavate,' see also p. 445.

<sup>8</sup> Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, p. 710.

‘longer’ *yod*. With no vowels in the ancient Hebrew text,<sup>9</sup> the two words look and sound like this: with the long *vav* כָּאֲרוּ<sup>10</sup> *kah’ru* (they pierced), and with the shorter *yod* כָּאֲרִי *kah’ah’ree* (like a lion). Also, in the Hebrew word *kah’ru*, the *vav* changes from its consonantal ‘v’ sound to its vowel sound of ‘ou.’ (written as ‘u.’) The ‘ou’ is the personal pronoun (they), attached to the verb, a common occurrence in Hebrew.

The two words are identical except for their *last* letter, the *vav* or the *yod*. (Hebrew is read from right to left, just the opposite of English.) The ancient Jewish sages who wrote the Septuagint must have seen a *vav* as the last letter of the Hebrew text they had. The *vav* makes the word *kah’ru* (‘they pierced’). This solves our grammar (no verb in the phrase, *like a lion my hands and my feet*), and the translation problem. We now have a verb (‘pierced’) and a pronoun (‘they’). ‘*They pierced my hands and my feet*’ is the way the Hebrew sentence was originally written by King David and the way it should read today. God was wanting us to know through King David that evil men pierced the hands and feet of the Prince. Yes, this is how God used their evil for His good purpose.

The traditional Jewish text of today was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Masoretes, or those Scribes before them, to destroy the obvious Messianic meaning with its full implications of a *Pierced Prince*. In copying text it was common, over many scribal copies, for the shorter *yod* to be lengthened, to become the longer *vav*, as one scribe would make the *yod* slightly longer and the next scribe might think it was a *vav*,<sup>11</sup> and it’s possible, but not probable, that the longer *vav* would be thought to be a ‘long *yod*,’ and made shorter over time. Such a reversal, in this specific case, for the *vav* to be ‘mistaken’ for the shorter *yod*, could only be intentional on the part of the Scribes because there were ample ancient texts to properly determine the Hebrew word, it points directly to the Pierced Prince, and as we’ll see, the current Jewish text, with *like a lion*, didn’t come upon the scene until a century and a half after the Prince was pierced.

The Hebrew word with the *vav*, *kah’ru* (‘they pierced’) appears in Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the Syriac Bible for Psalm 22:17.<sup>12</sup> By no means does the traditional Jewish translation of the text go unchallenged by ancient sources. Therefore, it’s not just ‘the Septuagint versus the Masoretic’ version of the text, which would have been strong evidence *against* the Masoretic version.<sup>13</sup> With a number of texts available to the

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrew vowels, just dots and dashes, are generally placed under the Hebrew letters, alongside them, or over them. Originally they weren’t in the Scriptures. They were created by the Masoretes to help with pronunciation, but the vowels weren’t ‘God-given.’ King David wrote this Psalm about 3,000 years ago (c. 1000 BC). The Masoretes knew of Messiah Yeshua being crucified and either they, or those before them, intentionally altered the text. ‘The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, dating from c. 150 BC–75 AD, reveals that in this period there was not always the scrupulous uniformity of text that was so stressed in later centuries. The scrolls show numerous small variations in orthography, both as against the later Masoretic text, and between each other. It is also evident from the notings of corrections and of variant alternatives that scribes felt free to choose according to their personal taste and discretion between different readings.’ Menachem Cohen, *The Idea of the Sanctity of the Biblical Text and the Science of Textual Criticism in HaMikrah V’anachnu*, ed. Uriel Simon, *HaMachon L’Yahadut U’Machshava Bat-Z’mananu and Dvir*, Tel-Aviv, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, based on the lexicon of Professor Wilhelm Gesenius; Edward Robinson, translator and E. Rodiger, editor, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1978), p. 468. The verb is translated as ‘to bore or dig or hew.’ Brown translates v. 17 as, ‘they have bored (dugged, hewn) my hands and my feet.’

<sup>11</sup> A number of errors in the Hebrew Bible relate to this phenomenon.

<sup>12</sup> John Kohlenberger III, Editor, *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1979), p. 368. Note n states, ‘Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint and Syriac’ have *kah’ru* (they pierced), while ‘most Hebrew manuscripts’ have *kah’ah’ree* (like a lion). This means there are a number of reliable texts that translate the word as ‘they pierced,’ including Hebrew manuscripts and the Syriac Peshitta, a direct translation from the ancient Hebrew Bible. Also, just because there are more Hebrew manuscripts with the reading, ‘like the loin,’ majority in this case doesn’t mean it’s correct. Copying an error hundreds of times doesn’t make the text authoritative. It just means there are many manuscripts with errors in them.

<sup>13</sup> This is because the Masoretic text offers an exceptionally poor grammatical structure and a completely unsatisfac-

translators, there was, and is, no justifiable reason to print, ‘Like a lion,’ *except to intentionally hide the Pierced Prince*. Against these other manuscripts the traditional Hebrew Bible of today finds itself alone in its perverse translation of, ‘Like a lion my hands and my feet.’

Noted scholar C. F. Keil explains that the proper reading is ‘they pierced’ and that Ps. 22:17 isn’t the only Scripture where the Prince is prophesied of as being pierced:

“The fulfilment in the nailing of the hands and...of the feet of the Crucified One to the cross is clear. This is not the only passage in which it is predicated that the future Christ shall be murderously pierced; but it is the same in Isa. 53:5, where He is said to be pierced (מְחַלְלֵם) on account of our sins, and in Zech. 12:10,”<sup>14</sup> the word דָּקְרָוּ (da’karu) “does not mean to ridicule, or scoff at, but only to pierce, thrust through, and to slay by any kind of death whatever (cf. Lam. 4:9). And the context shows...it signifies to put to death.”<sup>15</sup>

## The Dead Sea Scrolls to the Rescue

The reading of ‘lion’ instead of ‘pierced’ only first appears in Hebrew manuscripts of the late second century AD, which confirms that it was intentionally altered because by then, Christians were using it in their dialogues with the Jewish people to convince them that the pierced Prince was Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). The scribes didn’t like that and so the *vav* was shortened to a *yod* and the reading of ‘lion’ entered the text. Shon Hopkin states that the original Hebrew text of Psalm 22:17 had, ‘they pierced my hands and my feet,’ and not, ‘like a lion, my hands and my feet.’ He writes,

“Sometime around the end of the second century AD, the word כָּאֲרִי (‘like a lion’) as opposed to the third-person plural verb כָּאֲרוּ (‘pierced/dug’) appears in Hebrew manuscripts. Eventually, כָּאֲרִי (like a lion) came to be the majority Masoretic reading, and accordingly ...כָּאֲרוּ (they pierced) appears as a variant reading in the Masoretic notes.”<sup>16</sup>

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tory translation for v. 17.

<sup>14</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5, *Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001) paragraph 13696 (Accordance Bible Software).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, *Minor Prophets*, para. 31404. “nothing of any weight can be urged against the rendering of the LXX ὄστρακον (Peshito בְּזַעַר, Vulg. *foderunt*); for even if we do not suppose any special verb כָּאֲרוּ, כָּאֲרִי can be expanded from כָּרוּ (כָּרוּ) = כָּרוּ (כָּרוּ) just in the same manner as כָּאֲרוּ, Zech. 14:10 from כָּרוּ, cf. כָּאֲרוּ Dan. 7:16. And that כָּרוּ can signify not merely to dig out and dig into, engrave, but also to dig through, pierce.”

“Karl Fredreich Keil (1807-1888) was a German Protestant exegetist...In 1887 he moved to Rodlitz, continuing his literary activity there until his death. He belonged to the strictly orthodox and conservative school of Hengstenberg. Ignoring modern criticism almost entirely, all his writings represent the view that the books of the Old and New Testaments are to be retained as the revealed word of God. He regarded the development of German theological science as a passing phase of error. His chief work is the commentary on the Old Testament (1866), which he undertook with Franz Delitzsch. To this work he contributed commentaries on all the books from Genesis through Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and *The Minor Prophets*.” (From <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/kdo.html>.)

The Bible Hub has: “they pierced The textual reading is kaari, ‘as a lion my hands and feet;’ but several MSS read karoo, and others karoo in the margin, which affords the reading adopted by our translators. So the LXX, so also the Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic; and as all the Evangelists so quote the passage, and apply it to the crucifixion of Christ, there seems little doubt that this is the genuine reading; especially when it is considered that the other contains no sense at all. The whole difference lies between wav and yood, which might be easily taken for one another. (From <http://biblehub.com/psalms/22-16.htm>)

<sup>16</sup> Shon Hopkin, *The Psalm 22:16 Controversy: New Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls* at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=3716&context=byusq>. Elliger and Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p.1104.

In support of his position that ‘like a lion’ had not appeared in any Masoretic text before the end of the second century AD, Hopkin speaks of Hebrew manuscripts in his paper, which had the change, dating back to only the end of the second century and not before. Then he presents the Dead Sea Scrolls parchment for Psalm 22:17, which confirms that the original text had, ‘they pierced my hands and my feet:’

“One of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments contains Psalm 22:16 (Heb. v. 17). This fragment, published in 1997, was discovered in a cache of Scrolls at Nahal Hever in Israel during the early 1950s. Significantly, the 5/6 Hev–Sev4Ps Fragment 11 of Psalm 22 contains the crucial word in the form of a third-person plural verb, written כָּאָרוּ (‘pierced/dug’).<sup>17</sup> While it can often be difficult to distinguish between a *waw* (v)<sup>18</sup> and *yod* (y) in the Dead Sea texts, the editors of the most authoritative edition of the scrolls, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, confirm this reading in its transliteration and in two notes. It states:”

“Although the photograph...is very faded, most of the letters are clearly identifiable under magnification,’ and regarding כָּאָרוּ (they pierced) the editors conclude that ‘the *waw* (v) is clearly distinguishable and the variant (כָּאָרוּ they pierced) reading is assured.”<sup>19</sup>

Hopkin provides a photograph of the Hebrew text and a magnification of the word itself from the Dead Sea Scrolls that clearly presents the Hebrew word having the *vav* (*kah’ru*; they pierced), and not the *yod* (*kah’ah’ree*; like the lion).<sup>20</sup> Although it’s not uncommon for a *yod* to be lengthen into a *vav*, the Septuagint, the Peshitta and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the shortening of the *vav* into a *yod* was not an accident, but intentionally done more than a century *after* the Prince was pierced, to destroy the verse so it wouldn’t proclaim the Pierced Prince—the Messiah of Israel, as Yeshua of Nazareth; the Crucified One.

## Conclusion

The only ‘lion hands’ that we find in the text are those lyin’ hands that corrupted it. There have always been rebels who have hated the love of the King. In their arrogance they despise what the King has done for them. Those rebels have done their utmost to keep you from knowing the truth about your God and your Prince, who gave His life for you so that you could have life—real life from Above.

Two thousand years ago God sent the Prince to be pierced. It was Their plan. I know that there have been many vicious anti-Semites who have accused us Jews of being ‘Christ killers,’ and millions of us have been murdered, tortured and persecuted because of that satanic lie. The divine truth is that the Prince loves His Jewish people, and He gave His life for us. He *willingly* laid down His life (John 10:18) so that we stubborn rebels, every Jew, and even the Gentiles, could be forgiven of our sins and great rebellion against the King.

The human side of this truth is that, because of our sins, *both* Jew and Gentile pierced the Prince. Our highest authority, the Sanhedrin, declared that the Prince was a blasphemer (Matthew 26:65). Our High Priest placed the Prince under oath and demanded to know if He was the Prince, the Son of the God. Yeshua said that He was and the High Priest accused the Prince of blasphemy. Our Sanhedrin condemned Him to death,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> There are many English teachers who wrongly think that the *vav* should be a *waw* or *w* sound, but this has only come upon the scene in the last 40 years or so, and is not able to withstand scrutiny.

<sup>19</sup> Hopkin, *The Psalm 22:16 Controversy*. James Charlesworth and others, eds., *Miscellaneous Texts from the Judaean Desert, in Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, 38 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), vol. 38: pp. 160-161.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

but we Jews didn't have the authority to kill anyone at that time. That right had been taken out of our hands by the Roman Empire. Pontius Pilate, representing Rome, and symbolically all the Gentile world, ordered the death of the Prince, thus implicating every Jew and Gentile in the most sinister murder that the Heavens have ever witnessed. The Prince was pure, holy and sinless, yet He took our just punishment upon Himself because of His love for you and me.

Psalm 22, written 800 years before the Romans made crucifixion a means of death, is a perfect picture of a man being pierced-through or crucified. King David, who wrote the psalm, was prophesying. He described what the Messiah, *the Pierced Prince*,<sup>21</sup> would go through for us as He cried, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?' (Heb. Psalm 22:2; Matthew 27:46).

Have you ever felt that God has abandoned you? Our Prince felt that too, so that you would know that He is able to feel and to comfort you in all your pain and confusion. He's also able to heal and to save you.<sup>22</sup> His Father, the King, has given all authority to Him for Judgment Day and eternal life.<sup>23</sup>

Fairy tale or divine drama? Once upon a time there was this handsome Prince, who was *pierced* so that your heart might be, too. If you ask Him to forgive your sins and to come into your heart, you'll *know* why He's called the Prince of Peace; you'll be filled with shalom (divine peace), and you'll *know* that He's not a fairy tale. Yeshua made a way for you to enter into God's eternal Kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 53:6 speaks of the Servant of Yahveh (Is. 52:13), the Prince of Peace, being pierced through, but the English text of the Jewish Bible fails to bring this out, substituting the word 'wounded' instead. Zechariah 12:10 also writes of this Prince being pierced ('thrust through'), but the Jewish translation and subsequent note (a), obliterate the true meaning the divine text seeks to convey.

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 35:1-10; 53:1-12; 61:1, Acts 3:15; 5:31.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 28:18; John 5:19-30; 17:2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Revised on 26 November 2017.