

## **Zechariah 12:10 – Another Case of Rabbinical Revisionism?**

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The rabbis used to believe in a Messiah who would suffer and die, according to the prophets of Israel. The Talmud, for example, refers to a Messiah, Son of Joseph, who will be slain (Sukkah 52a). In presenting this concept of a Messiah who will be slain, the Talmudic rabbis refer to Zechariah 12:10. How different things are in the modern Rabbinic Jewish community! Zechariah 12:10 is no longer regarded as a passage referring to the Messiah at all. In fact, two prominent translations of the Hebrew Bible by Jewish publishers, this ancient Messianic prophecy is translated in such a way as to remove all Messianic implications. Should the text of the Bible be changed to accommodate modern Jewish theology?

Below is a comparison of the New American Standard Bible with the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh and the Stone Edition Tanakh, the two translations in question:

American Standard Bible

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.

Jewish Publication Society Tanakh

But I will fill the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem with a spirit of pity and compassion; and they shall lament to me about those who are slain, wailing over them as over a favorite son and showing bitter grief as over a first-born.

Stone Edition Tanakh

I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitant of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications. They will look toward me because of those whom they have stabbed; they will mourn over him as one mourns over an only [child], and be embittered over him like the embitterment over a [deceased] firstborn.

The key differences in these three translations occur in the clause "so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced" (NASB). The New American Standard suggests that the people have pierced the speaker, who is God. The Jewish Publication Society and the Stone Edition suggest that people are lamenting to the speaker, God, about a third party who has been slain. Below is an English transliteration of the Hebrew of the passage with a word-for-word rendering beneath it:

Vehibbiytu elay et asher-daqaru  
And they will look unto me whom they pierced

Contrast this with the Jewish publication society text for this clause that reads, "and they shall lament to me about those who are slain", of the Stone Edition that reads, "They will look toward me because of those whom they have stabbed". The Jewish Publication Society at least offers some explanation as to why they have departed from the Hebrew. A footnote reads, "Meaning of Heb. uncertain". But there is no uncertainty about the Hebrew of this passage.

The first verb, vehibbiytu, occurs some 69 times in the Hebrew Bible, and twice in this exact same form. Its other occurrence in this exact form is in Exodus 33:8, which the Jewish Publication Society has no problem translating "and gaze". The second word is simply a preposition with an object suffix, elay, which occurs extremely frequently and means "unto me". The next word, et, is an object marker, which is untranslatable and occurs thousands of times. The word asher is also an everyday word in biblical Hebrew meaning "which" or "whom". The final word, daqaru, is less common, but is by no means a rare word by Hebrew standards. It is used 11 times in the Hebrew Bible and is in a form so simple that a first semester Hebrew student easily recognizes it. The verb is a third person plural, meaning "they pierced". In a similar form, a third person singular, this word occurs in Numbers 25:8, and the Jewish Publication Society translates it quite simply "and stabbed", referring to Phinehas stabbing the Israelite who had brought the curse onto Israel.

So where is the "uncertain" Hebrew? The Jewish Publication Society understood this Hebrew in other verses. Quite simply, the problem for the Jewish Publication Society is one of theology, not translation. The problem is that the speaker in this passage is clearly God, who says he will fill Jerusalem and the House of David with a spirit of favor. Then God says that he will be pierced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the House of David. How can Jewish people, or any people, pierce God?

That is the shocking message of Zechariah, and all who believe that God spoke through Zechariah would let the text stand as it is. The alternative translations offered by the Jewish Publication Society and the Stone Edition Tanakh make no sense. In the case of the Jewish Publication Society, a main verb is completely changed without explanation (gaze/lament) and a subject is switched with an object ("they pierced" is changed to "those who are slain"). Neither change has any legitimate basis whatsoever. In the case of the Stone Edition, a phrase is added which is completely absent in the Hebrew ("because of those"). The nature of these unfounded changes is so drastic, that any verse could be made to say anything if these "rules" of Hebrew are followed.

What did Zechariah actually mean when he referred to the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem looking toward God, whom they had pierced? The whole prophecy of Zechariah 12 refers to a time at the end when all nations are attacking Jerusalem. The Stone Edition Tanakh confirms this, by citing a Targum to the effect that "Before the end of days, the nations will besiege Jerusalem . . ." During this scene, in the battle of the end of days, God will appear (Zechariah 14:4) and will stand on the Mount of Olives. The Jewish people will look to him, realizing that they (along with all the rest of humanity) had pierced this one. When did they pierce him? When Yeshua (Jesus) was pierced by the Roman soldier, God was pierced, since Yeshua was and is none other than God who took on human form.

By piercing Yeshua, we all (Jewish or non-Jewish) pierced God. How can it be said that we pierced him, since we did not hold the spear? The answer to this was predicted 800 years before Yeshua was born. Isaiah said this, "But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, NASB). When the soldier pierced Yeshua, it was because of our sin. If we had not sinned, he would not have needed to be pierced. We pierced him. Those inhabitants of Jerusalem at the end of days, who will look unto God, they pierced him too.