

# A PIERCING LOOK AT A FALSE CLAIM<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Christian missionaries use the verse Zechariah 12:10 as a so-called "proof text" to support their claim that the crucifixion of Jesus was foretold in the Hebrew Bible. Although the passage is problematic for this purpose even in the variety of its mistranslated versions that appear in most Christian Bibles, a slight modification in the manner in which it is applied in one of the Gospels was designed to "fix" this difficulty. However, a rigorous analysis of this passage and the entire chapter demonstrates that such imputed Christological relevance is absurd.

## II. THE HEBREW TEXT AND SEVERAL CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH TRANSLATIONS

Table II-1 displays the Hebrew text of Zechariah 12:10, along with five Jewish translations and seven Christian translations. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) shows two cross-referenced passages in the New Testament for Zechariah 12:10. These passages, shown below Table II-1, are quoted from the King James Version (KJV).

**Table II-1 – The Hebrew Text of Zechariah 12:10 with Jewish and Christian Translations**

Hebrew Text of Zechariah 12:10 - זכריה יב, י	
וְשָׁפַכְתִּי עַל-בַּיִת דָּוִד וְעַל יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם רוּחַ חַן וְתַחֲנוּנִים וְהִבִּיטוּ אֵלַי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-דָּקְרוּ וְסָפְדוּ עָלָיו כְּמִסְפַּד עַל-הַיָּחִיד וְהִמְרָ עָלָיו כְּהִמְרָ עַל-הַבְּכוֹר׃	
Jewish Translations of Zechariah 12:10	
ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach; ArtScroll/Mesorah	I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications. <b>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.</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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 א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "h"
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
  - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
  - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
  - A vocalized שְׁוָ (שְׁוָ אֵ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the ***daGESH*** (emphasis)

Jewish Publication Society Bible (1917)	And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; <b>and they shall look unto Me because they have thrust him through; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.</b>
Judaica Press NACH Series; translation by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg	And I will pour out upon the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem with a spirit of grace and supplications. <b>And they shall look to me because of those who have been thrust through [with swords], and they shall mourn over it as one mourns over an only son and shall be in bitterness, therefore, as one is embittered over a firstborn son.</b>
The Jerusalem Bible, Koren Publishing	But I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Yerushalayim the spirit of grace and of supplication: <b>and they shall look towards me, regarding those whom the nations have thrust through. And they shall mourn for him (that is slain) as one mourns for an only son, and shall be in bitterness over him, as one that is in bitterness for a firstborn.</b>
Soncino Books of the Bible; edited by Rabbi Dr. A. Cohen	And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; <b>and they shall look unto Me, because they have thrust him through; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.</b>
<b>Christian Translations of Zechariah 12:10</b>	
Darby Translation	And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; <b>and they shall look on me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only [son], and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for [his] firstborn.</b>
King James Version (KJV)	And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: <b>and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.</b>
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, <b>so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced<sup>(i)</sup>; 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 firstborn.</b>
New International Version (NIV)	And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. <b>They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.</b>
New Living Translation (NLT)	Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on all the people of Jerusalem. <b>They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.</b>
Revised Standard Version (RSV)	And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, <b>when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.</b>

Young's Literal Translation (YLT)	And I have poured on the house of David, And on the inhabitant of Jerusalem, A spirit of grace and supplications, <b>And they have looked unto Me whom they pierced, And they have mourned over it, Like a mourning over the only one, And they have been in bitterness for it, Like a bitterness over the first-born.</b>
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- (i) Cross-referenced New Testament passages for the word "pierced" in Zechariah 12:10:  
John 19:37(KJV) - And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.  
Revelation 1:7(KJV) - Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of minor variations, the Jewish translations are generally consistent, and the Christian translations are generally consistent (the exception is the RSV). However, these two groups of translations show significant differences relative to each other, as indicated by the highlighted phrases, and these form the basis for the analysis of this verse.

### III. OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

#### A. Overview of the Christian perspective

Zechariah 12:10 is perceived by Christians as foretelling the crucifixion of Jesus and the grief that followed, a concept that is reinforced in New Testament narratives. The author of the Gospel of John quotes almost verbatim the specific phrase of the verse that allegedly foretells the crucifixion, albeit with the help of some revision of the text that appears in the Hebrew:

**John 19:37(KJV) - And again another scripture saith, They shall look on HIM whom they pierced.**

Then, with some help from the Book of Revelation (believed to have been authored by the same person), the connection with Zechariah 12:10 is reinforced:

**Revelation 1:7(KJV) - Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.**

The passage in the Gospel of John that leads up to the verse quoted above sheds some light on the Christian scenario:

**John 19:31-36(KJV) – (31) The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (32) Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. (33) But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: (34) But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. (35) And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. (36) For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.**

Depending on how a person got crucified, death could have been relatively quick, or relatively slow. Suspension from the hands or wrists nailed to the crossbeam,

without having the feet supported in some manner, would cause the body's weight to collapse the chest cavity and result in death from asphyxiation – a fairly rapid process. However, when the feet were supported, either with a small wooden pedestal beneath them or by being nailed to the central-beam of the cross, a person could stay alive for as much as several days.

Jewish Law requires a prompt burial following a person's death:

**Deuteronomy 21:22-23 – (22) And if a man were to commit a sin deserving death, and he were to be put to death, and you hanged him on a tree. (23) His body shall not remain upon the tree overnight, rather you shall surely bury him on that [same] day, for a hanged one is a cursed of God; and you shall not defile your land, which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.**

Thus, during the era of the Roman occupation, it was customary for the Jews to plead with the Romans to break the leg bones of Jewish people who were crucified, in order to quicken their death and, thereby, enable their burial within the required amount of time.

According to the account in the Gospel of John, there was no need to break the legs of Jesus. The Roman soldiers who approached Jesus perceived that he was already dead, and then they stabbed his side with a sword to confirm that he had expired. This act was depicted as yet another prophecy fulfilled some two millennia ago, and which also identified Jesus with the *Passover Lamb* (e.g., 1Corinthians 5:7), since the requirements specified in the Torah included the prohibition against breaking any of its bones:

**Exodus 12:46 - In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not bring from the house any of the meat outdoors; neither shall you break any bone of it.**

More detailed Christian interpretations of Zechariah 12:10, which are beyond the scope of this essay, may be found in the standard Christian sources, such as the commentaries of Matthew Henry and Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown.<sup>2</sup>

## **B. The Jewish perspective**

From the Jewish perspective, two classes of interpretations of the passage that contains the verse Zechariah 12:10 have been proposed. One has it as an historical Biblical event from the prophet's own era, while the other considers it a prophecy of an event that will take place at some future time just prior to the commencement of the messianic era.

### **1. Historical event**

Although it is difficult to find a specific time in Jewish history that fits well with the events that are described in this chapter, the predominant view on Zechariah 12:10 among the Jewish commentators is that it describes the

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<sup>2</sup> These commentaries, along with others, are available at - <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>

mourning over those Jews who were slain while defending something precious to them – their country, their city, and, perhaps also their faith. Those who fell in the battle were the ones described as having been *thrust through* with the swords and spears of soldiers from the attacking nations. In other words, this verse describes an historical event from the general Biblical era around which this account was written.

The noted Christian commentator S. R. Driver took exception to the common Christian interpretation of Zechariah 12:10, stating in his commentary:<sup>3</sup>

**"The context points plainly to some historical event in the prophet's own time, for which the people would eventually feel that sorrow here described."**

Driver apparently recognized that the passage describes an historical event from Zechariah's era. He actually went further and suggested that some of the events described in this chapter suit the situation that existed during the time of the Maccabees.<sup>4</sup>

Several modern Jewish commentators consider this verse as alluding to the death of some unknown Jewish martyr who was killed by the people. They speculate this could have been God's appointed leader of a restored Jewish nation, whom they eventually put to death.

## 2. Messianic prophecy

The other interpretation of this passage, which originates in the Talmud, holds that it is a messianic prophecy. Although Christianity also views this passage as messianic, according to the traditional Jewish concept of the Messiah, this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.

Since there is an ambiguity in the Hebrew text in terms of whether the subject (i.e., the "victim") is an individual or a group – the particular pronouns used here are applied to both in the Hebrew Bible – there are two ways to interpret this passage within this messianic perspective. Both interpretations are consistent with the Hebrew text as well as with Jewish tradition.

The "singular pronoun scenario" depicts a great hero who will fall in the battle of the nations against Jerusalem, described earlier in the same chapter (Zechariah 12:3). Because this person will be one of towering stature among the Jewish people, the mourning for him will be great and widespread; the entire nation and all of Jerusalem are described as being in a state of great mourning (Zechariah 12:12). As had happened in previous times, the crying and mourning is a vehicle that leads people to repent and return to observance of Torah:

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from *Soncino Books of the Bible - Zechariah*, Rev. Dr. A. Cohen (Editor), p. 322; Soncino Press (1983)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 320

**Numbers 14:39-40 – (39) And Moses spoke these words to all the Children of Israel; and the people mourned greatly. (40) And they arose early in the morning, and they ascended to the top of the mountain, saying; "Behold, we are here, and we will go up to the place of which the Lord has spoken, for we have sinned."**

This particular scenario fits well with the "two Messiahs" paradigm. According to this Talmudic tradition, the first "Messiah", מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן-יוֹסֵף (*mashi'ah BEN YOSEF*), **Messiah son of Joseph**, will be a hero out of either of the tribes that emerged from Joseph – Ephraim and Menasheh. He will fight and be killed in the Great War, an event that will be the catalyst for all of Israel to turn to God and repent. After that, מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן-דָּוִד (*mashi'ah BEN DAVID*), **Messiah son of David**, the Davidic Messiah, will appear and usher in the messianic era and its promised redemption of Israel.

The intensity of the sadness is quantified in the very next verse:

**Zechariah 12:11 - On that day there shall be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon.**

Here, the mourning in Jerusalem is compared with the mourning in the valley of Megiddo, a reference to the death of King Josiah, the last of the great and righteous kings of Judah (see 2Kings 23:25), who was killed in a battle with Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt:

**2Kings 23:29-30 – (29) In his [Josiah's] days, Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt, went up against the King of Assyria by the Euphrates River; and King Josiah went against him, and he [Pharaoh Necho] killed him [Josiah] at Megiddo, when he saw him. (30) And his servants transported him dead from Megiddo, and [they] brought him to Jerusalem, and [they] buried him in his grave; and the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead. {See also 2Chronicles 35:22-24.}**

Following Josiah's death, the mourning throughout the Kingdom of Judah and in Jerusalem was immense, as alluded to by Jeremiah, and as recorded in the historical books:

**Lamentations 4:20 - The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was captured in their pits, of whom we said, "In his protection we shall live among the nations."**

**2Chronicles 35:24-25 - (24) And his servants took him from that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and he was buried among the graves of his forefathers; and all of Judah and Jerusalem were mourning for Josiah. (25) And Jeremiah lamented Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women had spoken of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them a statute upon Israel; and behold, they are written in the lamentations.**

According to the Sages of the Talmud, these descriptions also characterize the magnitude of the grief that will prevail over the death of מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן-יוֹסֵף, who will be slain in the war of Gog and Magog (see Ezekiel Chapters 38&39).

In the "plural pronoun scenario", the singular pronoun is applied to a group of Jewish people, a usage that is common in the Hebrew Bible [for example, in Exodus 1:11 the Jewish people, i.e., the nation of Israel, are referred to by the same singular pronoun **אֵלָיו** (**aLAV**), **over/upon/for him**]. According to Zechariah 12:10, the new spirit that God will pour unto the Jewish people will motivate them to look toward Him concerning those Jewish martyrs who fell in the battle over Jerusalem before His divine intervention on their behalf. Here, as was the case in the previous scenario, the intensity of the mourning over those who will fall in the Great War of the future is still reflected via the historical references that appear at Zechariah 12:11.

In summary, the Jewish perspective on Zechariah 12:10 is that it may be viewed either as an historical biblical event or, alternatively, as a messianic event that is yet to be fulfilled. Neither of these interpretations can accommodate, nor agrees with the Christian view that it is a messianic prophecy that was fulfilled with the crucifixion of Jesus.

#### IV. PRONOUNS AND CONTEXT: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE VERSE

As noted above, the Christian interpretation of this passage as foretelling the crucifixion of Jesus is problematic. An analysis of the KJV rendition, which represents a typical Christian translation of Zechariah 12:10, helps illustrate some of the salient issues. To facilitate the analysis, the KJV rendition is divided into two segments:

**Zechariah 12:10A(KJV) - And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications:**

**Zechariah 12:10B(KJV) - and THEY shall look upon ME whom they have pierced, and THEY shall mourn for HIM, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for HIM, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.**

All translations of Zechariah 12:10A share the following attributes:

- **Variations among virtually all translations, both Jewish and Christian, are insignificant; they all agree on context and content.**
- **In all translations, both Jewish and Christian, it is clear that God of the Hebrew Bible, the Creator, is speaking here, i.e., "... I [God] will pour ..."**

In other words, there is general agreement on the context of Zechariah 12:10(A). However, this is not the case with Zechariah 12:10B(KJV), which is problematic and, thus, requires additional analysis.

##### A. Who are "THEY", who is "ME", and who is "HIM"?

Adding the bracketed comments that reflect the Christian perspective (see below) to Zechariah 12:10B(KJV) clarifies its syntax and brings to light the inherent problems with the typical Christian interpretation of this passage:

and THEY [the Jews {or the Romans}] shall look upon ME [Jesus] whom THEY [the Romans] have pierced; and THEY [the Jews] shall mourn for HIM [Jesus] as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for HIM [Jesus] as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Given that God is the speaker, and that, for most of Christendom, Jesus is part of the triune godhead (the Trinity), can the pronouns “ME” and “HIM”, as they appear in this passage, refer to the same entity, namely, to Jesus? The answer is, “No, these pronouns cannot refer to the same entity simultaneously since the prophet is unambiguously speaking of two distinct entities.” In addition, there is the issue of the pronoun “I”, as used in Zechariah 12:10A. *How is it possible that God speaks in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person in Zechariah 12:10A and then refers to Himself as both “ME” and “HIM” in Zechariah 12:10B?* Clearly, this is absurd!

## B. The New Testament to the rescue?

Evidently, the author of the Gospel of John was familiar with this passage in the Book of Zechariah, and he understood its problematic nature relative to the new religion. To interpret this passage as saying that, at some future time, the Jewish people shall look unto Jesus, whom the Romans had pierced, did not appear to him to be what Zechariah had in mind. So he decided to “fix” this problem by altering and abridging the passage in the following manner:

**John 19:37(KJV) - And again another scripture saith, THEY shall look on HIM whom THEY pierced.**

The RSV translators utilized this passage in the New Testament to alter the context of Zechariah's own words in their translation of Zechariah 12:10 -

**Zechariah 12:10(RSV) - And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when THEY look on HIM whom THEY have pierced, THEY shall mourn for HIM, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over HIM, as one weeps over a first-born.**

Although this appears to solve the problem created by the two distinct pronouns “ME” and “HIM”, it does not resolve the identity issue that exists between the two segments of this verse, Zechariah 12:10A&B. Moreover, the RSV rendition is a deliberate attempt to revise the prophet's original words, and was designed to “harmonize” this passage and the Christian paradigm. The evidence to support this statement is presented in Table IV.B-1, which shows the Hebrew text, a Jewish translation, and the RSV rendition of Zechariah 12:10B broken into three components, with respective terms highlighted.

**Table IV.B-1 – Comparing RSV translation with Hebrew text and Jewish translation**

	Revised Standard Version Translation	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew (reflecting the various published Jewish translations)	Hebrew Text
	<b>Zechariah 12:10B</b>		זכריה יב,י [ב]
i	so that, when THEY look <b>ON HIM</b> whom THEY have pierced,	and THEY shall look <b>to ME</b> because of <b>HIM/THEM</b> who THEY [the enemy] thrust through	וְהִבִּיטוּ אֵלַי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-דָּקְרוּ



ii	THEY shall mourn <b>for HIM</b> , as one mourns for an only child,	and THEY shall mourn <b>over HIM/THEM</b> as one mourns over an only son,	וְסָפְדוּ עָלָיו כְּמִסְפֵּד עַל-הַיָּחִיד
iii	and weep bitterly <b>over HIM</b> , as one weeps over a first-born.	and be embittered <b>over HIM/THEM</b> as one is embittered over a firstborn son.	וְהָמַר עָלָיו כְּהָמַר עַל-הַבְּכוֹר :

The significant Hebrew pronouns in the respective phrases of Zechariah 12:10B are as follows:

- Zechariah 12:10B(i) – Pronoun is אֵלַי (*eiLAi*), to ME or toward ME
- Zechariah 12:10B(ii) – Pronoun is עָלָיו (*aLAV*), over HIM or upon HIM or for HIM
- Zechariah 12:10B(iii) – Pronoun is עָלָיו (*aLAV*), over HIM or upon HIM or for HIM

The combination of these two terms, אֵלַי and עָלָיו, occurring in the same verse, is found at Genesis 44:21, a verse that is translated correctly in the RSV:

**Genesis 44:21(RSV)** - Then you said to your servants, "Bring him down **TO ME** [אֵלַי], that I may set my eyes **UPON HIM** [עָלָיו]."

The RSV version of Zechariah 12:10B(i) reflects John 19:37 rather than follow the text in the Hebrew Bible, which reveals the “unholy” motive of the translators.

Also interesting to note is that, according to the Gospel of John, the prophecy was fulfilled at the time when the Roman soldiers pierced the side of Jesus. Yet, neither the New Testament nor the historical record account for the fulfillment of the part of the prophecy in which all the inhabitants of Jerusalem would mourn for Jesus. Quite to the contrary, the New Testament portrays the Jews, who were the majority of Jerusalem's population, as being anything but compassionate and mournful over the death of Jesus. Clearly, this prophecy was not fulfilled when Jesus died!

### C. How well did Christian translators know the Hebrew language?

There is yet another serious problem with common Christian renditions of this verse, one that stems from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew language and its idioms. At issue is the mistranslation of the Hebrew expression אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דָּקְרוּ (*ET asHER-daQARu*) found at Zechariah 12:10B(i), the correct translation of which is: **because of** (or, **concerning**) **him who they pierced** [or, alternatively, **because of** (or, **concerning**) **the ones who they pierced**].

The Hebrew words אֵת (*ET*) [אֶת- when in a hyphenated phrase] and אֲשֶׁר (*asHER*) are ubiquitous in the Hebrew Bible. אֵת is a preposition that serves as the marker of a definite direct object of a verb. In its root form, it is similar to the definite article “**the**” in English. However, unlike the case of the English language, אֵת can be inflected, and thereby it becomes the objective case of the respective pronoun, such as אֹתִי (*oti*), **me** (1<sup>st</sup>-person, singular, masculine or

feminine pronoun; as in "*He taught me.*"), אֹתְךָ (*otCHA*), **you** (2<sup>nd</sup>-person, singular, masculine pronoun; as in "*He taught you.*"), etc. The word אֵת may also serve as the preposition **with**, and it can be inflected in that context as well, albeit differently, such as, אֵתִי (*iti*), **with me**, אֵתְךָ (*itCHA*), **with you**, etc. The Hebrew word אֲשֶׁר (*asHER*) is a conjunction, a part of speech that connects other words or phrases. אֲשֶׁר can mean **that** or **which**, **who** or **whom**, **because** or **for**, **as to** or **regarding**, and it may take on other meanings when combined with prepositions.

אֵת and אֲשֶׁר also combine into the phrase אֵת אֲשֶׁר (*ET asHER*) [also אֵת־אֲשֶׁר]. This phrase, too, can take on several different meanings, as the grammatical syntax of a sentence, or verse, dictates. The major difference between the term אֲשֶׁר and the phrase אֵת אֲשֶׁר is that the preposition אֵת adds “new” specificity, since it is the marker of a definite direct object of the verb, and the particular translation depends on the context of the specific passage. In the case of Zechariah 12:10B(i), the phrase אֵת אֲשֶׁר must be read as, **because of/concerning/regarding him** [or **them**] **that** [or **who**] [verb], or simply **because** [verb] **him** [or **them**], but not just as **whom** or **the one**, which is common among Christian translations.

The following example demonstrates this usage in another passage in which the grammatical syntax is similar to that found at Zechariah 12:10B(i):

**1Samuel 30:23** – And David said, "You will not do so, my brothers, **CONCERNING THAT WHICH** [אֵת אֲשֶׁר] the Lord has given us, and He watched over us, and delivered the troop that came against us into our hand.

That the KJV and several other Christian "Old Testament" versions translate this passage in a manner that is close to being correct:

**1Samuel 30:23(KJV)** – Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, **with that which** the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. [See also the American Standard Version, 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version, Darby Translation, and Young’s Literal Translation for similar renditions.]

The meaning of the phrase אֵת אֲשֶׁר at Zechariah 12:10B(i) appears to have been better understood by the authors of the Christian Septuagint (LXX):<sup>5</sup>

**Zechariah 12:10B(i)(LXX)** - and they shall look upon me, **because** they have mocked me,

These examples demonstrate that the common Christian translations of Zechariah 12:10B(i) are inconsistent with its Hebrew text and overall context.

<sup>5</sup> Although it is badly mistranslated and inaccurate, the LXX rendition bears little resemblance to the common Christian translations, yet it has the אֵת אֲשֶׁר at least partially right.

#### D. Zechariah 12:10 in context

A proper understanding of the pronouns in this verse should be sufficient to show that the various Christian renditions of Zechariah 12:10 are incompatible with the syntax of the verse, and the common Christian interpretation is inconsistent with context of the rest of the chapter.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter in the Book of Zechariah describes a war of nations against Jerusalem (the war of Gog & Magog), in which Judeans fight on the side of the enemy for a while and, when they realize that God is with the people of Jerusalem, they “turn around” and join the battle against the enemy, which eventually will lead to the deliverance of Jerusalem and the restoration of its status. The victory will be followed by grievous mourning over those who fell in the battle.

Zechariah 12:7-14 clearly shows that the prophet could not possibly have spoken of Jesus. For example, the prophet makes the promise that Jerusalem and its inhabitants will be protected:

**Zechariah 12:7-8 – (7) And the Lord will save the tents of Judah first, so that the splendor of the House of David and the splendor of the inhabitants of Jerusalem should not overwhelm Judah. (8) On that day, the Lord shall protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and it shall come to pass on that day that even the weakest among them shall be like David; and the House of David shall be as angels, like an angel of the Lord before them.**

The historical record testifies that, less than 40 years after Jesus died, Jerusalem was torched and destroyed by the Romans, and its people were expelled and exiled. So, this is a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled.

The prophet also foretells the destruction of those nations that will attack Jerusalem:

**Zechariah 12:9 – And it shall come to pass on that day, [that] I will seek to destroy all the nations that have come upon Jerusalem.**

However, according to the historical record, none of these nations were destroyed in the days of Jesus. This, too, remains a prophecy not yet fulfilled.

Finally, **the only son** [הַיָּחִידִד] (*ha'yaḥīḏ*) and **the firstborn** [הַבְּכוֹר] (*ha'b<sup>e</sup>chor*)] are referenced in Zechariah 12:10. Although the prophet uses the definite article in both cases, it is evident from the context that these terms are mentioned in the sense of “a deceased only son” and “a deceased firstborn”, i.e., any only son and any firstborn who has died – no one is identified by name anywhere in the nearby text as to whom specifically this might apply. Such usage of these terms is common in the Hebrew Bible, as the following example demonstrates:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Note: The terms הַבְּכוֹר and הַיָּחִידִד are alternate spellings of the same word.

**Deuteronomy 21:15-16** – (15) If a man has two wives, one beloved and another despised, and they have born him sons, the beloved and the despised one; and if **the firstborn son [הַבְּכֹרִית (ha'BEN ha'b<sup>e</sup>CHOR)]** is hers who was hated; (16) and it will be on the day he [the husband] bequeaths his property to his sons, that he will not be able to give the son of the beloved one the birthright over the son of the despised one, **the {real} firstborn [הַבְּכֹרִית]**.

On the other hand, whenever the same expression, **הַבְּכֹרִית**, is used in reference to a particular individual, that person is named somewhere in the nearby text, as the following example demonstrates:

**Genesis 41:51** - And Joseph called the name of **the firstborn [הַבְּכֹרִית] Manasseh**; because "God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house."

Zechariah's intent in using these generic phrases here, albeit inclusive of the definite article, was to describe the intensity of the mourning in Jerusalem and throughout the land, that it would be like the grief over a deceased only son or firstborn.

Neither the historical record nor the accounts in the New Testament indicate that Jesus died in this war, and there are no recorded accounts of any intense mourning throughout Jerusalem and Judea following his death.

## V. SUMMARY

Christian missionaries claim that this Zechariah 12:10 prophesies the crucifixion of Jesus, and point to the "Passion" accounts in the New Testament as its fulfillment.

The Jewish interpretations of Zechariah 12:10 fall into two general categories. The first and predominant view among the Jewish commentators is that the passage refers to an historical event; however, the opinions vary concerning which event is alluded to. The other view is that the passage is messianic, and that it alludes to the war of Gog & Magog, in which the hero, **מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן-יוֹסֵף**, Messiah son of Joseph, will be killed, and the mourning within the Jewish community following his death.

The analysis of this passage, which focused on Hebrew grammar and consistency with both syntax and overall context, demonstrates that the common Christian interpretation of this verse is incompatible with the Hebrew text. The primary problem with the Christian interpretation is that it is based on mistranslated and altered texts in the Christian Bible. These attempts to infuse Christological significance into the passage actually resulted in irreconcilable issues vis-à-vis both the Hebrew text and the historical record.

**Conclusion: Zechariah 12:10 is not a prophecy about the crucifixion of Jesus.**