

## PSALMS 2:12 - "KISS THE SON"? WHERE IS THAT SON OF A GUN?<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

Internet sources that list Christian "messianic prophecies", along with the alleged accounts of their "fulfillment" in the New Testament, contain at least seven entries for Psalms 2.<sup>2</sup> Among this set, Psalms 2:12 is the most prominently used so-called "proof text" in the portfolio of Christian missionaries.

Many Christian translations, the King James Version among them, employ the mistranslation **Kiss the Son** of the Hebrew opening phrase נִשְׁקוּ-בֶר (nashqu-var), the origin of which is a homiletic interpretation, not a translation, of this phrase by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, the noted Jewish exegete.

A rigorous analysis of the linguistic and grammatical structure of this phrase, understanding the difference between a translation and a homiletic interpretation, and placing the psalm in its proper context, will demonstrate that **Kiss the Son** is an incorrect translation of נִשְׁקוּ-בֶר, which removes the basis on which the so-called "proof text" was fashioned.

When the psalm is read in the Hebrew text, or in an correct translation thereof, with proper attention to its context, the true and entirely different perspective unfolds.

### II. COMPARISON OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Side-by-side renditions of key verses in Psalms 2 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.

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<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 י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ה 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 **SHVA** (וְ נִשְׁקוּ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **DAGESH** (emphasis)

<sup>2</sup> Two examples of such lists are: (1) [365 Messianic prophecies that Yeshua fulfilled](http://therefinersfire.org/messianic_prophecies.htm) - [http://therefinersfire.org/messianic\\_prophecies.htm](http://therefinersfire.org/messianic_prophecies.htm), and (2) [Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus Christ](http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/messiah.htm) - <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/messiah.htm>

[The references are found in the New American Standard Bible (NASB), but the corresponding passages, quoted below the table, are quoted from the KJV.]

**Table II-1 – Psalms 2:1-2, 6-8, 11-12 (Shown are only verses mentioned in the analysis)**

vs.	King James Version Translation	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Hebrew Text
<b>Psalms 2</b>			<b>תהילים ב</b>
1	Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? <sup>(i)</sup>	Why are nations in uproar; and [why are] kingdoms saying vain things?	לָמָּה רָגְשׁוּ גּוֹיִם וְלֵאמֹרִים יְהוֹרִיק: א
2	The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, <sup>(ii)</sup>	Kings of a land stand up, and nobles take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed [saying]:	יִתְנַצְּבוּ   מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּ-יַחַד עַל-יְהוָה וְעַל-מְשִׁיחוֹ: ב
6	Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.	"But I have enthroned My king upon Zion, My holy mountain."	וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּתִּי מַלְכִּי עַל-צִיּוֹן הַר-קֹדֶשׁ: ו
7	I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art <b>my Son</b> ; this day have I begotten thee. <sup>(iii)</sup>	I will tell of the decree; The Lord said to me, "You are <b>My son</b> ; this day have I begotten you."	אֶסְפָּרָה אֶל חֵק יְהוָה אֶמַר אֵלַי בְּנִי אַתָּה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדָתִיךָ: ז
8	Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. <sup>(iv)</sup>	"Ask of Me, and I shall make nations your inheritance; and the ends of the earth [I shall make] your possession."	שְׂאֵל מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶתְנָה גּוֹיִם נַחֲלָתְךָ וְאַחֲזָתְךָ אֶפְסֵי-אֶרֶץ: ח
11	Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.	Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.	עֲבֹדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה בִּירְאָה וּגְיִלוֹ בְרַעְדָּה: יא
12	<b>Kiss the Son</b> , lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.	<b>Do homage in purity</b> , lest He become scornful and you perish in the way, for in a flash His anger will kindle; happy are all who take refuge in Him.	נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר פִּוְ-יֶאֱנָף   וְתִאבְדוּ דֶרֶךְ כִּי-יִבְעַר כְּמַעֲט אַפּוֹ אֲשֶׁרִי כָּל-חֹסְיָבוֹ: יב

(i) Acts 4:25(KJV) – Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

(ii) Acts 4:26(KJV) – The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

(iii) Acts 13:33(KJV) - God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Hebrews 1:5(KJV) - For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

Hebrews 5:5(KJV) - So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

(iv) Revelation 2:26(KJV) – And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Excepting two revisions from the Hebrew, one obvious and the other subtle, the two translations are reasonably consistent. The obvious revision occurs at Psalms 2:12, where the two translations disagree on the opening phrase, and where the Christian rendition imputes a heavy dose of Christology into the context of King David's words. The subtle change occurs at Psalms 2:7, where the KJV translators have replaced

the term "son" with "Son", an action that enhances the Christological appeal of this psalm ("Son" is also used as part of the revision in Psalms 2:12). In addition, tenses of some verbs were changed, but these do not have a serious impact on the context.

### III. OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

#### A. The Christian Perspective

The Christian view of this psalm is based on the claim that David and his kingdom are "types" that foreshadow Jesus and his kingdom, and that the prophecies related to the "first coming" of Jesus refer to David as his ancestor. In most Christian Bibles the opening phrase of Psalms 2:12, "Kiss the **Son**", creates a link to the declaration in Psalms 2:6-8 regarding who this "Son" is.

Verses 1, 2, 7, 8 are cross-referenced with passages in the New Testament as shown under Table II-1. These passages in the New Testament identify Jesus as the subject in the corresponding verses being "quoted" from Psalms 2. Curiously, the New Testament is silent on the opening phrase of Psalms 2:12. This may very well be due to the fact that, in the form it was known to the authors of the New Testament, they did not consider this part of Psalms 2:12 to have any Christological value. Yet, excepting the ancient translations, most Christian translations render the opening phrase of Psalms 2:12 as **Kiss the Son**, an overt attempt to link Jesus into this verse as well.

Standard Christian sources, such as the commentaries by Matthew Henry (MH) and Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown (JF&B), provide more detailed verse-by-verse Christian interpretations of Psalms 2 that are beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. The Jewish Perspective

King David, the author of Psalms 2, is saying here that, no matter how powerful the force, nothing can thwart God's will. The Jewish Sages, both ancient and modern, are split on whether the subject of this psalm is מָשִׁיחַ (*mashi'ah*), the **Messiah**, or a former king and, if a former king, they disagree on the identity of this king. The noted Jewish Sage RaSHI (Rabbi Shlomoh Ben Yitzhak [1040-1105 CE]) offers the following commentary at the beginning of the psalm:

"Our Rabbis expound it as relating to king Messiah; but according to its plain meaning it is proper to interpret it in connection with David, in the light of the statement: '*And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the fortress.*' (2Samuel 5:17)."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> MH and JF&B commentaries are available on the Internet at - <http://www.blueletterbible.org/>

<sup>4</sup> *Soncino Books of the Bible – The Psalms*, Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, Editor, p. 3, The Soncino Press (1992)

So that in its plain meaning, **פְּשָׁט (PSHAT)**,<sup>5</sup> this psalm describes a plot against one of God's anointed kings, which could very well have been its author, King David, who even speaks in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person at one point. The following outline of the psalm helps to clarify this:

- **Verses 1-3 – Kings plan to revolt against God by attacking one of His anointed**
- **Verses 4-6 – God ridicules the plot, chastises and scares the schemers**
- **Verses 7-9 – The anointed one relates God's promise of his triumph over the schemers**
- **Verses 10-12 – The anointed one urges the schemers to accept God's ways & choices**

Although the author of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament attempts to link Psalms 2:1-2 to Jesus (Acts 4:25-26), other psalms indicate that King David is this anointed king:

**Psalms 89:21-22[20-21]<sup>6</sup> – (21) I found David My servant; I anointed him with My holy oil. (22) With whom My hand will be established; even My arm will strengthen him.**

And, as was noted by RaSHI, the Hebrew Bible records situations in which foreign kings and rulers took counsel (plotted) against King David:

**2Samuel 5:17 - And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David; and David heard [of it], and David went down to the fortress.**

**2Samuel 10:16-17 – (16) And Hadadezer sent, and brought out the Arameans that were from beyond the River; and they came to Helam, and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadadezer, before them. (17) And it was told to David; and he gathered together all Israel, and he crossed the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Arameans set themselves against David, and fought with him.**

None of these situations apply to Jesus since no accounts are recorded in the New Testament in which the leaders of the surrounding Gentile nations had hatched a plot against him, and for which Jesus waged war against them and militarily defeated them.

It is also evident that David was speaking about himself in this psalm:

**Psalms 2:7 – I will tell of the decree; The Lord said to me, "You are My son [בְּנִי (bni)]; this day have I begotten you."**

The New Testament "quotes" this verse as if God were speaking to Jesus (Acts 13:33), which is the likely motivation for the KJV translators to have changed "son" to "Son" at this verse. King David is the "son" here, a figurative characterization similar to the way God referred to Solomon as His "son" in His

<sup>5</sup> The methodology of Jewish biblical interpretation consists of four levels: **plain** (פְּשָׁט - PSHAT), **symbolic** (רֵמֶז - REMEZ), **homiletic** (דְּרֻשׁ - DRUSH; also דְּרָשׁ - DRASH), and **mystical** (סוּד - SOD). These four levels are commonly referred to by their Hebrew acronym פְּרַדְס״ (pronounced as **parDES**). It should be noted for future reference that, according to the Jewish rules of biblical exegesis, only the PSHAT, i.e., the plain meaning of the text, can serve as the basis for prophecy.

<sup>6</sup> Verse numbers shown in square brackets, e.g., [20-21], are those used in Christian bibles.

promise to David concerning the establishment of his everlasting dynasty (2Samuel 7:12-16):

**2Samuel 7:14 - I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son; so that when he goes astray I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with afflictions of human beings.**

And this figurative language is found elsewhere in the Book of Psalms:

**Psalms 89:20-21,27-28[19-20,26-27] – (20) Then You spoke in a vision to Your pious ones, and said, "I placed help upon a hero; I have raised a chosen one from the people. (21) I found David My servant; I anointed him with My holy oil." (27) "He will call to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' (28) Also I will make him a firstborn, highest of the kings of the earth."**

Verse 8 further indicates that David spoke about what God had promised him:

**Psalms 2:8 – "Ask of Me, and I shall make nations your inheritance; and the ends of the earth [I shall make] your possession."**

The Hebrew Bible records that, after many wars, this promise to King David was indeed fulfilled:

**2Samuel 7:1,9 – (1) And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around. (9) And I was with you wherever you went, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I have made for you a great name, like the name of the great ones who are on the earth.**

**1Chronicles 14:17 - And the fame of David went forth throughout all the lands; and the Lord placed the fear of him upon all the nations.**

Lastly, there is verse 12 which, as noted in the Introduction, is the focus of this article (more on it in the sections that follow):

**Psalm 2:12 - Do homage in purity [רַב־יָדָיִם], lest He become scornful and you perish in the way, for in a flash His anger will kindle; happy are all who take refuge in Him.**

The outline of the psalm indicates this verse is a continuation of the theme King David started in verse 11 where, in addressing the (Gentile) kings and judges of the earth, he exhorts them to follow the righteous path and rejoice, rather than continue to be wicked and suffer the consequences for it.

An alternate interpretation offered by some Jewish Sages has this verse pointing back to verse 7, where the "son" mentioned in it is a reference to King David, and its message is that acknowledging with sincerity of heart that King David is God's anointed avoids incurring His wrath.

The Jewish messianic interpretation of Psalms 2 parallels the alternate interpretation, since David's name is used in the Hebrew Bible as a metaphoric reference to מְשִׁיחַ (e.g., Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5).

#### IV. A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE OPENING PHRASE IN PSALMS 2:12

The phrase in question, נִשְׁקוּ-בַר, consists of two components, נִשְׁקוּ (*nashqu*) – a verb, and בַּר (*VAR*) – a noun. The verb נִשְׁקוּ is conjugated in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, plural, imperative, in the *pi'EL* stem (the active intensive verb form in Hebrew grammar) of the root verb נִשָּׂק (*NUN-SHIN-QOF*), which appears on 35 occasions in the Hebrew Bible in different conjugations with several meanings, depending on the particular verb stem and the context within the respective passage. The most common contextual application of this verb is **[to] kiss** (e.g., Genesis 27:27), from which the noun נִשְׂקָה (*n<sup>e</sup>shiqah*), **a kiss**, is derived (e.g., it appears in the plural form at Song of Songs 1:2). The other applications are: **[to] unite** (e.g., Psalms 85:11[10]; correctly translated in the KJV!), and **to knock against** or **to touch** (e.g., Ezekiel 3:13; correctly translated in the KJV!). In some cases, this verb is applied in the context of **[to] arm oneself with a weapon** (e.g., Psalms 78:9; correctly translated in the KJV!), from this context the noun נִשְׂקָה (*Nesheq*), **arms/weapons**, is derived (e.g., as at Job 39:21). The rendition of the term נִשְׁקוּ at Psalms 2:12 as the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, plural, imperative, **kiss**, in the KJV, and in most other Christian translations, becomes problematic when combined with the way in which the next term is translated in these Bibles.

The noun בַּר (*BAR*) is rendered here as בֵּר for grammatical reasons.<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word בֵּר [also בַּר] occurs in the Hebrew Bible 22 times with two distinct meanings. Its most common application is as the noun **grain** (15x; e.g., Genesis 41:35,49); the other application is as the adjective **pure** or **clean** or **choice** [as in select, superior, top quality] (7x; e.g., Job 11:4).

The correct translation of בַּר at Psalms 2:12 is **pure** or **clean**, or **purity** or **cleanliness**, and it is even possible that King David used it here as a metaphor for the Torah (see the *Targum Yonatan* rendition below). The KJV and most other Christian translations render this as **the Son**, claiming that בַּר, as an alternate form of בֵּר, is the Aramaic word for **son**. However, this claim is invalidated by at least the following linguistic issues:

- **No Aramaic words are used in the Book of Psalms. The Aramaic language was not the spoken vernacular until the time of the Babylonian exile, i.e., in the sixth century BCE, long after the Psalms were composed and recorded by King David and others.**
- **The Aramaic term בַּר is used in some of the Aramaic portions in the Hebrew Bible (but not in the Book of Psalms). This term has the meanings of the noun 'a son' as well as the possessive form, 'son of ...', where the rest of this expression must be provided in the phrase itself. For example, in the Aramaic portion of the Book of Daniel appears the expression בְּרֵךְ אֱלֹהֵי בְרֵךְ (K<sup>e</sup>VAR ENASH), 'like a son of man' (Daniel 7:13). In the very next chapter, after the language switches back to the Hebrew, appears the Hebrew equivalent**

<sup>7</sup> The grammatical rule states that, when the letter ב (BET) follows an open syllable, i.e., one that ends with a vowel, then the ב is replaced by the letter בֵ (VET), the same letter, but without the accent mark in it. [This is also the case with several other letters of the Hebrew alphabet.]

[without the preposition כְּ (k<sup>e</sup>-), like], בְּרֵאדָם (BEN-ADAM), ‘son of man’. The Hebrew term for ‘son’, בֶּן (BEN), is used by King David in Psalms 2:7 in the inflected form בְּנִי, ‘my son’. Had he used the equivalent Aramaic word in Psalms 2:7, it would have been בְּרִי (BRI).

- Even if בֶּן in Psalms 2:12 were Aramaic, and even if it meant ‘a son’ (neither of which is the case here), the form of the Aramaic noun with a definite article, אֲבִרָא (bra), is missing from the phrase וַיִּשָּׂקֵן בֶּן, and the proper translation would then be ‘Kiss **a** son’, not ‘Kiss **the** son’.<sup>8</sup>

A word study on the Hebrew (not Aramaic!) term בֶּן illustrates the problem with the KJV rendition. There are two instances of וַיְבֵר (U'VAR), where the term is prefixed by the conjunction וַי (U-), **and** [a variant of the conjunction וַי (V<sup>e</sup>-)].<sup>9</sup> The analysis is shown in Table IV-1, where the item of interest is located at the top of the list.

**Table IV-1 – The Hebrew word בֶּן/בָּר in the Hebrew Bible and its renditions in the KJV**

Term	#	Pronunciation	Reference	Correct Translation	KJV Rendition
בֶּן	1	VAR	<b>Psalms 2:12</b>	<b>purity</b>	<b>the Son</b>
בֶּן	3	BAR	Amos 5:11	grain	wheat
			Amos 8:6	grain	the wheat
			Psalms 72:16	grain	corn
בָּר	9	BAR	Genesis 41:35	grain	corn
			Genesis 41:49	grain	corn
			Genesis 42:3	grain	corn
			Genesis 42:25	grain	corn
			Genesis 45:23	grain	corn
			Joel 2:24	grain	wheat
			Amos 8:5	grain	wheat
			Psalms 65:14[13]	grain	corn
			Proverbs 11:26	grain	corn
בָּר	1	BAR	Proverbs 14:4	clean [empty]	clean
בָּרָה	3	baRAH	Psalms 19:9	pure	pure
			Song of Songs 6:9	the choice one	the choice one
			Song of Songs 6:10	clear	clear
הַבָּר	1	haBAR	Jeremiah 23:28	the wheat	the wheat
בַּבָּר	1	baBAR	Job 39:4	on the grain	with corn
וַיְבֵר	2	U'VAR	Psalms 24:4	and a pure [heart]	and a pure [heart]
			Job 11:4	and [I was] clean	and [I am] clean
לְבָרִי	1	l <sup>h</sup> VAR <sup>EI</sup>	Psalms 73:1	to the pure [of heart]	to [such as are of] a clean [heart]

*Is it not odd that the KJV translators captured the proper context in 21 of the 22 cases, and only at Psalms 2:12 their rendition deviated from the correct meaning?*

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Professor Mordochai Ben Tziyyon, I learnt that the Aramaic term בֶּן can represent both the noun, “a son” as well as the possessive form “son of ...”. The אֲ suffix in Aramaic often represents the definite article, so that the phrase “the son” in Aramaic is אֲבִרָא.

<sup>9</sup> The change is due to a grammatical rule which states that, when a letter ב follows the conjunction וַי, then וַי changes to וַי, and ב changes to ב. This same rule also applies to the letters כ and פ, which then change to the letters כ and פ, respectively, which changes their sound from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’.

A variant of בָּרָא, namely, בֹּרַ (BOR), **purity** or **cleanliness**, is also used in the Hebrew Bible, where it appears on seven occasions, as shown in Table IV-2.

**Table IV-2 – The Hebrew word בֹּרַ in the Hebrew Bible and its renditions in the KJV**

Term	#	Pronunciation	Reference	Correct Translation	KJV Rendition
בֹּרַ	2	b <sup>e</sup> VOR	Job 9:30	with purity	so clean
			Job 22:30	because of the purity of [your hands]	by the pureness of [thine hands]
בְּבֹרַ	3	k <sup>e</sup> VOR	2 Samuel 22:21	according to the cleanness of [my hands]	according to the cleanness of [my hands]
			Psalms 18:21[20]		
			Psalms 18:25[24]		
בְּבֹרִי	1	k <sup>e</sup> VORI	2 Sam 22:25	according to my cleanness	according to my cleanness
בְּבֹרַ	1	kaBOR	Isaiah 1:25	as with soap	purely [purge]

It is evident from Table IV-2 that the KJV translators were able to recognize this variant and translate it properly in each of the seven instances.

The question that begs for an answer is, "*Is it just by coincidence that the only significant mistranslation by the KJV of בָּרָא occurs in a passage with imputed Christological relevance?*" The data presented in Tables IV-1&2 provide the answer to this question.

## V. From Where Came "Kiss the Son"?

It is interesting to research the possible sources for the common Christian translation of the opening passage in Psalms 2:12, נִשְׁקוּ-בֶר, as **Kiss the Son**.

Several are clues available that help in this effort. One clue was already mentioned before – none of the authors of the New Testament ever point to or invoke this opening phrase at Psalms 2:12. As stated above, this indicates that it had no particular Christological appeal in the form this verse was known to them.

The following marginal note from the R.V. (the 1881 Revised Version [of the 1611 KJV Bible]), which uses the translation **Kiss the Son**, is quoted by one source:

Some ancient versions render, "lay hold of (or, receive) instruction," others "worship in purity."<sup>10</sup>

The results of a search for additional clues in several available ancient Biblical texts are summarized below, listed in ascending chronological order of the source:

✧ The **Targum Yonatan**, an ancient interpretive translation into the Aramaic vernacular of the Hebrew Bible, has קְבִילוּ אוֹלְפָנָא (*qabilu ulfaNA*), **accept the Law**.

<sup>10</sup> *Soncino Books of the Bible – The Psalms*, Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, Editor, p. 5, The Soncino Press (1992)

‡ The **Greek LXX**, an ancient Christian translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, has δρᾶσθε παιδείας (*draxasthe paideias*), which breaks down as follows: δρᾶσθε (*draxasthe*), **grasp** (in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, plural, imperative); παιδείας (*paideias*), **instructions**. Thus, the **Greek LXX** has **Grasp instructions**.

‡ **Jerome's Latin Vulgate** (405 CE) has **adore pure**. **adore** is the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, plural, imperative of **adoro**, [to] call upon, or [to] entreat, or [to] worship; **purus** is the root verb [to] be clean/pure, from which comes the Latin term **pure**, meaning **purity**. Therefore, this translates as **Worship in purity**.

○ The **1582 Rheims** translation of **Jerome's Latin Vulgate** renders **adore pure** as **Embrace discipline**.

○ In 1907, Pope Pius X ordered a revision of **Jerome's Latin Vulgate**, and the new version has **Apprehendite disciplinam**, which translates as **Embrace discipline**.

‡ **Martin Luther's 1545 German translation** has **Kisset den Sohn**, which translates as **Kiss the Son**.

‡ The **1611 KJV** [The **Authorized Version** (A. V.)] has **Kiss the Son**.

The above information indicates that the revision took place somewhere between the fifth and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. It should be noted that this revision of the Hebrew text has not been universally accepted by all Christian translations, old and new.

Curiously, the likely source for this mistranslation may come as a surprise to many: the two great Jewish Sages, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra [1089-1164 CE], the Jewish-Spanish Bible exegete and philosopher, and Rabbi David Qimḥi [1160-1235 CE], the Jewish-French/Spanish Bible exegete and grammarian. Rabbi Ibn Ezra offered the interpretation **Kiss the son** by linking the phrase נִשְׁקֶהוּ בֶּן־יָדָי to the anointed individual referred to as **My son** in Psalms 2:7, and he suggested that it is a reference to מְשִׁיחַ. Rabbi David Qimḥi accepted Ibn Ezra's interpretation. They explain that the anointed one, who will be **pure**, i.e., he will be righteous by keeping Torah, is מְשִׁיחַ and, therefore, people should pay homage to him. In the Hebrew Bible, a way of paying homage is at times expressed through the act of kissing someone or something:

**1Samuel 10:1 - And Samuel took the vial of oil, and poured it on his [Saul's] head, and kissed him. And he [Samuel] said [to Saul], "Indeed, the Lord has anointed you to be a ruler over His inheritance."**

This interpretation caught the attention of the Church, which seized upon it and applied it as referring to Jesus, the Messiah of Christianity. Rabbi David Qimḥi, aware of this misapplication, issued a detailed refutation to this Christological retrofit of his and Rabbi Ibn Ezra's interpretation of this phrase.<sup>11</sup> The fact that most Christian Bibles have retained **Kiss the Son** indicates that it is widely accepted as the proper translation, since it serves to enhance the Christological relevance of the entire Psalm.

## VI. AN EXCURSION INTO THE ARAMAIC DOMAIN

<sup>11</sup> See the Appendix (Section IX) for a reproduction of this refutation.

As was noted in Section IV, the common Aramaic noun for **son** is **בְּרָא**, not **בֵּר**. Several applications of the Aramaic term **בֵּר** are present throughout the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible, and these are shown in Table VI-1.

**Table VI-1 – The Aramaic word בֵּר in the Hebrew Bible and its renditions in the KJV**

Term	#	Pronunciation	Root	Reference	Correct Translation	KJV Rendition
בֵּר	1	VAR	בֵּר	Ezra 5:1	[the] son of [Iddo]	[the] son of [Iddo]
בֵּר	3	BAR	בֵּר	Ezra 5:2	[the] son of [Shealtiel]	[the] son of [Shealtiel]
				Ezra 5:2	[the] son of [Yehozadaq]	[the] son of [Jozadak]
				Ezra 6:14	[the] son of [Iddo]	[the] son of [Iddo]
בְּבֵר	2	k <sup>p</sup> VAR	בֵּר	Daniel 6:1[5:31]	at the age of [sixty two years]	being about [threescore and two years] old
				Daniel 7:13	like a son of [man]	like the <b>Son</b> of [man]
לְבֵר	1	l <sup>p</sup> VAR	בֵּר	Daniel 3:25	<u>Literal</u> : like a son of ["God"]. <u>In context</u> : like an angel*	the <b>Son</b> of [God]
בְּרָה	1	bREH	בֵּר	Daniel 5:22	son of his, i.e., his son	his son

\* The fact this was an angel is confirmed just three verses later:

Daniel 3:28 - Nebuchadnezzar cried out and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, **Who sent His ANGEL** and rescued His servants, who trusted Him; and [who] deviated from the command of the king, and risked their lives in order not to worship or prostrate themselves to any god except to their God.

Even the KJV confirms this with a reasonably accurate translation:

Daniel 3:28(KJV) - Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, **who hath sent his ANGEL**, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

As is evident from Table VI-1, all (undisputed) applications of the Aramaic noun **בֵּר** in the Hebrew Bible show that the term is used in the possessive construct, **son of...**, not as a free standing noun, **a son**, nor the noun with the definite article, **the son**.

## VII. AN EXCURSION INTO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: THE CASE OF בֵּר IN PROVERBS 31:2

Christian missionaries point to the use of the word **בֵּר** in Proverbs 31:2 as they attempt to support their claim that the expression **נְשִׁקוּ-בֵּר** uses the term **בֵּר** in the context of **son**. The term **בֵּר** occurs three times in Proverbs 31:2, but these were not included in either Table IV-1 or Table VI-1 due to the fact that their classification, as Hebrew or Aramaic terms, is ambiguous. An analysis of these three instances of **בֵּר** in Proverbs 31:2 is presented below to help determine their proper context and whatever relationship may exist, if any, with the usage of **בֵּר** in Psalms 2:12.

Table VII-1 provides the Hebrew text of Proverbs 31:2, as well as side-by-side translations – the KJV rendition is on the left side, a common Jewish translation is on the right side, and an alternate Jewish translation is in the middle.

**Table VII-1 – The instances of בַּר in Proverbs 31:2**

King James Version Translation	Alternate Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Common Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Hebrew Text
<b>Proverbs 31:2</b>			משלי לא,ב
What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?	What, my choice one, and what, [O] choice one of my womb; and what, [O] choice one of my vows?	What, my son, and what, son of my womb; and what, son of my vows?	מֵה־בָּרִי וּמֵה־בָּר־בֶּטְנִי וּמֵה־בָּר־נְדָרַי:

The three instances of בַּר are highlighted in the Hebrew and in the respective English translations of the verse. The first instance is the term בָּרִי (*bri*), rendered “**my son**” both in the KJV and in the common Jewish translation, and “**my choice one**” in the alternate Jewish translation. The remaining two instances are identical and are simply the term בַּר, rendered “**the son of ...**” in the KJV, “**son of ...**” in the common Jewish translation, and “**[O] choice one of ...**” in the alternate Jewish translation. It is noteworthy that, regardless of the differences in the respective renditions of בַּר, all three applications agree that it is a possessive construct of the noun. This fact alone is sufficient to invalidate the basis for comparing its use here with the use of the term בַּר in Psalms 2:12 by Christian missionaries.

The applications of בַּר in Proverbs 31:2 may be understood in two distinct ways, either of which leads to a correct interpretation of the verse:

- ✧ It may be the Aramaic term for ‘son of ...’, which was introduced into the original text at some later time
- ✧ It may be the Hebrew term described above as ‘pure’, or ‘clean’, or ‘choice’ [as in select, superior, top quality], and cast in a possessive construct

These two approaches are explained and evaluated below.

### A. The Case for the Aramaic בַּר

*Why is it plausible that בַּר in Proverbs 31:2 is the Aramaic possessive construct **son of ...** from the root noun בַּר, a **son**?*

According to Jewish tradition, and this is also accepted among Christians, King Solomon authored the following: **Proverbs** [מִשְׁלֵי (*mishlei*)], **Song of Songs** [שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (*shir ha'shirim*)], and **Ecclesiastes** [קֹהֶלֶת (*qohelet*)]. The Hebrew Bible records the following regarding King Solomon's works:

**1Kings 5:12 - And he [Solomon] spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five.**

**1Kings 11:41 - And the rest of the acts of Solomon and all that he did and his wisdom, they are assuredly written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon.**

Though the **Book of the Acts of Solomon** appears to have been lost and is unknown to us today, the Hebrew Bible and Christian Bibles contains the above-

mentioned three works of Solomon, and these may very well represent the surviving remnants of it. However, when the data provided in 1Kings 5:12 is contrasted with the actual contents of these works – **Proverbs** (915 verses/31 chapters), **Song of Songs** (117 verses/8 chapters), and **Ecclesiastes** (222 verses/12 chapters) – the numbers fall significantly short of those reported in 1Kings 5:12.

*What happened to the rest of King Solomon's writings?* There are different speculations about what the answer to this question might be. Among these, perhaps the most plausible paradigm is that the three Books being attributed to King Solomon – **Proverbs**, **Song of Songs**, and **Ecclesiastes** – are, in fact, versions of his complete original works, which were edited or redacted by others at a later time.

The Hebrew Bible offers clues that lend support to this theory. One such clue is provided in the opening verse of Proverbs 25:

**Proverbs 25:1** – These too are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, maintained.

*Why would it be necessary to make this statement in the first place?* Perhaps its purpose was to serve as a disclaimer, to indicate this is not King Solomon's original work but, rather, maintained by others who may have done some editing. King Hezekiah had his scribes create and maintain copies of the proverbs of Solomon for distribution throughout the Kingdom of Judah. It is well documented in the Hebrew Bible that, already at the time of Hezekiah's reign as King of Judah [ca. 728-699 BCE], the officials of his court spoke the Aramaic language, although it was not yet the vernacular among the population:

**2Kings 18:26** - And Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah and Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic for we understand it; do not speak with us in Judean within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." [See also Isaiah 36:11.]

The official positions each of the above-named individuals held are identified in another passage:

**2Kings 18:18** - And they summoned the king, and Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah who was appointed over the palace, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, came out to them. [See also Isaiah 36:3.]

It is quite plausible that, while maintaining and transcribing the proverbs, some editing and redacting took place, which could have easily included the introduction of the Aramaic term **בַּר** in Proverbs 31:2. From a strictly poetic stylistic perspective, albeit subjective, replacing the Hebrew **בְּנֵי** and **בְּן** with the Aramaic **בְּרֵי** and **בְּר**, respectively, makes the verse flow better. So, while the original material is credited to King Solomon, the recorded material may be the product of King Hezekiah's scribes and perhaps others.

There is still stronger evidence in the Hebrew Bible that supports this theory. If King Solomon's writings were edited during a later era, as exemplified by **Proverbs**, then this should also be reflected in his other two extant works, **Song of Songs** and **Ecclesiastes**. *Is this the case?* Yes, indeed it is!

Various linguistic indicators attest to the fact that elements of the language used in the Hebrew text of King Solomon's writings are of a vintage that is later than his own era. When those who are proficient and knowledgeable in the Hebrew language read through the Hebrew **Song of Songs** and **Ecclesiastes**, they will encounter words that are not native to Hebrew, but which are rooted in languages of some Near-Eastern nations of later times, among which were the Aramaic and Persian languages. One such example, the word פִּרְדֵּיִם (*pardes*), **an orchard**, is of Persian origin, and it appears in both **Song of Songs** (4:13) and **Ecclesiastes** (2:5; here in the plural form, פִּרְדֵּיִם [paradesim]). This particular term has a somewhat familiar "ring" to it; its Greek form, παραδεισος (*paradeisos*), is the origin of the English word **paradise**. The only other occurrence of this word in the Hebrew Bible is at Nehemiah 2:8 (a product of the fifth century BCE).

Another example is found in the **Song of Songs**, which contains the only three instances in the Hebrew Bible of the word שְׂמַדָּר (*smadar*), an Aramaic word of undetermined origin that means **early fruit** (of a vine or berry still in its budding stage; 2:13,15, 7:13).

A final example is the word פִּתְגָּם (*pitgam*), an Aramaic word of Persian origin that means **judgment, sentence, or order**, with one of its eight instances found in **Ecclesiastes** (8:11). The other seven cases of this word are at Esther 1:20 (which is in the Hebrew portion of the Hebrew Bible), Daniel 3:16, 4:14, Ezra 4:17, 5:7,11, 6:11 (which are all in Aramaic segments of the Hebrew Bible).

## B. The Case for the Hebrew בָּרַ

Some people will not accept, for one reason or another, the case presented above for the Aramaic בָּרַ. So here is another plausible explanation of the applications of בָּרַ in Proverbs 31:2, in which the Hebrew word, as described in Section IV, is shown to be utilized in the possessive constructs as "**choice one of ...**" from the root noun בָּרַ.

The alternate Jewish translation has the first two verses in Proverbs 31 as:

**Proverbs 31:1-2 – (1) The words of Lemuel the king; a prophecy with which his mother chastised him; (2) What, my choice one [בָּרַי], and what, [O] choice one of [בָּרַ] my womb; and what, [O] choice one of [בָּרַ] my vows?**

The inflected noun בָּרַ in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person, singular, masculine or feminine gender is בָּרַי, **my choice one**, or **my pure one**, puts the noun into its possessive form. In

the remaining two cases, the second noun in the phrase is inflected in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person, which leaves the noun בֵּר unchanged, except for a vowel change from a *qAMATS* under the letter ב (בֵּר) to a *paTAH* under it (בֵּר), which is due to the change from a standalone noun to its possessive form in the respective phrases.

*Considering the alternate translation, can this reading of Proverbs 31:2 be explained?* Possible later redacting notwithstanding, according to Jewish tradition, this Proverb is attributed to King Solomon. And, although the actual identity of King Lemuel is not crucial for the explanation of this verse, several Jewish Sages have proposed that it is yet another pseudonym for King Solomon. King Lemuel's mother, as she starts to give her son advice about ruling with dignity and justice, refers to him as **my choice one**. Based on the opening verse and the three characterizations found in the second verse, it appears that he was the most favored of her sons:<sup>12</sup>

- She devoted most of her instruction and education to him
- He was born with unusual natural talents, the most gifted of her sons
- She made great vows and offered up devout prayers to God, even before he was ever conceived, in her hopes for him

A similar use of the noun בֵּר in the context of **the choice one** is found here:

**Song of Songs 6:9** – My dove, my perfect one, is but one [of a kind]; she is one [of a kind] to her mother, **the choice one [בֵּרָה]** she is to the one who bore her; women saw her and acclaimed her, queens and concubines [saw her] and praised her;

The KJV agrees, as do many other Christian translations:

**Song of Songs 6:9(KJV)** - My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

Consequently, the Hebrew term בֵּר could easily apply in this same context at Proverbs 31:2.

It is not important which of the above two interpretations one accepts, and they are not mutually exclusive, which means that both may be valid explanations. The analysis presented here demonstrates the importance of an intimate and thorough knowledge of the Hebrew language as one of the tools for learning and understanding what the Hebrew Bible teaches.

**Sidebar note:** In Judaism, the phrase 'son of God' never takes on the Greek mythological meaning that the New Testament ascribes to it – a divine being that is a literal son of God – a concept that would never occur to a Jew. Greek gods have literal sons, but the One God of Israel does not (Rabbi David Qimhi's refutation of the Christian revision in Psalms 2:12 addresses this issue). To a Jewish person, the title 'son of God' may have either of the following two meanings:

<sup>12</sup> David had four sons with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother (1Chronicles 3:5).

- A king from the line of David and Solomon (e.g., 2Samuel 7:14, Psalms 89:28[27])
- Any one of us, as we are all metaphoric children of God, the Children of Israel in particular (e.g., Exodus 4:22, Jeremiah 31:8[9], Hosea 11:1)

Therefore, the only time the noun 'son' occurs in Psalms 2, which is the Hebrew word בְּנִי, 'my son', at Psalms 2:7, it refers to one of God's anointed Jewish kings (likely to be King David).

## VIII. SUMMARY

The goal of this study was to show that the claim by Christian missionaries about Psalms 2:12 is based on an incorrect translation of the opening phrase in the verse, נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר, and the false claim that it contains the Aramaic word for **son**. The analysis proved that the term בְּרִבָּר, as used in the Hebrew Bible, does not mean **son**, neither in Hebrew nor in Aramaic. The reasons that the rendition of this phrase as **Kiss the Son** is an incorrect "modern" revision in many Christian Bibles are:

- It is a grammatically incorrect translation of the Hebrew phrase
  - The phrase נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר does not contain the term בְּרִבָּר, the form of the Aramaic noun בֵּר with the definite article. Therefore, if בֵּר were the Aramaic noun for 'a son', then the phrase would have had to be translated as 'Kiss **a** son', not 'Kiss **the** son'
  - If בֵּר in Psalms 2:12 were an Aramaic word, then, as used in the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible, it is the possessive form 'son of ...' (where the rest of this expression must be provided in the phrase itself), not the term for 'son'
- There are no Aramaic words in the Book of Psalms
  - Both Jews and Christians generally agree that 19,478 of the 19,479 words in the Masoretic Text of the Book of Psalms are Hebrew words. Does it make any sense to say that בֵּר is the lone Aramaic word therein?
- There was no logical reason for King David, the author of this psalm, to have used an Aramaic word in Psalms 2:12, or elsewhere in his works
  - He lived several centuries before the Babylonian exile, in which the Jews began to formally use Aramaic as the vernacular
  - He used an inflected form of the Hebrew noun בֵּן, son, in the same psalm
  - He never used Aramaic words in any of his other psalms
- The authors of the New Testament did not find any Christological significance in this phrase
  - There are no references or pointers to it in the New Testament
  - Ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible, by Christians and Jews, which post-date the canonization of the New Testament, have correct translations of the phrase

**Conclusion:** The translation of the Hebrew phrase נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר as 'Kiss the Son' is not only incorrect, it is a later product of Christian translators. Therefore, the Christian perspective on Psalms 2:12 is invalid.

## IX. SUPPLEMENTARY SECTION

Reproduced here, with permission from the publishers, is the response by Rabbi David Qimḥi (referred to as *Redak* in the source – a transliteration of the Hebrew acronym for his name) to the Christian claims concerning his and Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra's interpretation of נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר as **Kiss the son**.

Before getting to the response by *Redak*, two brief notes are in order. The first is about Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (*Chida* – this, too, is a transliteration of the Hebrew acronym for his name), who is credited with the discovery of this material. *Chida* [1724-1806 CE] was born in Jerusalem and became a well-known Jewish scholar who wrote several classic works in Halachah (Jewish Law). He is regarded as one of the most fascinating and multi-faceted figures in Jewish history. He traveled extensively, and wherever he visited, *Chida* made sure to inspect the important libraries. He thereby became familiar with many thousands of manuscripts, and a portion from one of these is the text being reproduced below. Out of these visits grew his remarkably compact and informative classic bibliographic and biographic work, *Shem HaGedolim*. During his lifetime, *Chida* produced some one hundred volumes in every field of scholarship. [This is an edited and condensed version of the biographical sketch found on the Orthodox Union (OU) website, under the title, "Great Leaders of our People"].

The second note concerns the translation of the Hebrew phrase נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר, shown below as **Arm yourselves with purity**. This is the rendition in the Judaica Press publication.<sup>13</sup> It is one of several acceptable translations of the phrase.

#### APPENDIX: REDAK<sup>14</sup>

R' Chaim Joseph David Azulai, known by the acronym *Chida*, writes in the diary of his travels that when he was in Paris, he visited a library of manuscripts, where he saw "many hundreds of our books in manuscript, and there was a *Redak* on Psalms, in which there was more than [in] the printed edition, and we saw on the verse (2:12) a column larger than half a folio."

2:12 – **Arm yourselves with purity** – Heb. נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר [sic;<sup>15</sup> actual is נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר]. The Christians [rendering: Kiss the son] explain this as referring to Jesus, but the verse they bring as evidence and which they make a support to their error is itself their stumbling block. This is (verse 1[sic; a misprint that should be verse 7]): "The Lord said to me, 'You are my son.'" If they tell you that he was God's son, tell them that we cannot say that a human being is God's son, because the son is of the species of the father. Since it is impossible to say, for example, that this horse is Reuben's son, the one to whom God said, "You are my son," must be of His kind and be a God like Him. Moreover, He said, "this day I have begotten you." and the one begotten is of the same species as the one who begot him. Tell

<sup>13</sup> *PSALMS, Volume One – A New English Translation*, Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, p. 9, The Judaica Press (1991).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pp. clxvii-clxviii.

<sup>15</sup> The notation [sic] is generally used in written texts to indicate that the previous word or phrase exactly reproduces the original, which may be an unusual form or even an error (as it is in this case).

them also that in divinity there cannot be a father and a son, because divinity cannot be divided. It is not a body that can be divided, but God is one in all kinds of oneness; He will neither increase, decrease, nor be divided. Tell them further that the father precedes the son in time and that the son is a product of the father. Although neither can have his name without the other – for one cannot be called a father until he has a son and one cannot be called a son unless he has a father – nevertheless, the one called father undoubtedly had existed before he had a son. Consequently, the God in Whom you believe, Whom you call the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost – the part that you call the Father preceded the part you call Son, for if they had always existed together, they would be called twin brothers; you could not call them Father and Son, and not begotten and begetter, for the begetter must undoubtedly precede the begotten. Now if they say to you that the one who is not divine cannot be called the son of God, tell them that we can speak of God only figuratively, as it is said about Him: *the mouth of the Lord, the eyes of the Lord, the ears of the Lord*, and the like, which are figurative. Likewise, it is figurative when Scripture says: *the son of God, the sons of God*, for whoever performs His commandments and His mission is called a son, as the son performs the orders of the father. Therefore, the stars are called the sons of God, as (Job 38:7): "And all the sons of God shouted." Similarly, when man – because of the heavenly spirit within him and prompted by the intelligent soul which guides him – performs the commandments of God, he is called His son. Therefore, He says, "You are My son; today I begot you." And He says (Exod. 4:22): "Israel is my firstborn son." And He says (Deut. 14:1): "You are children of the Lord your God." And He says (ibid. 32:6): "Is he not your father, who possessed you," and He says (II Samuel 7:14): "I shall be to him as a father, and he will be to Me as a son."

Tell them further: This God of Whom you speak – the Father said to the Son, "Request of Me and I shall make nations your inheritance." How is it that the Son requests of the Father? Is he not a God like Him, and does he not have power over the nations and the ends of the earth like Him? Moreover, before the request, nations were not his inheritance; if so, was the strength of this god lacking in the beginning, and did he later gain strength? That cannot be said of a god. Now if they tell you that that is said only concerning the flesh, [that] after the god took on a physical body, he said to the flesh that he should ask of him and he would give him nations as his inheritance, that was not so, for the flesh never had dominion or any ruling power over any nation. If they answer you that he said that the [Christian] faith would be accepted, [that too is not true,] because the majority of the nations, both Jews and Ishmaelites, did not accept his faith.

Behold, I have instructed you what to answer them concerning the psalm. If they ask you its meaning, explain it according to either one of the two interpretations that you wish to choose: either concerning David or the King Messiah, as I have explained to you.

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