

פטור-רחם

אבנר רמו

In the Book of Numbers we hear God telling Aaron about the share of the all the contributions of the Israelites that will be allocated to the priests:

וזה-לך תרומת מתנם, לכל-תנופת בני ישראל-לך נתתים ולבניך ולבנותיך אתך לחק-
עולם: כל-טהור בביתך יאכל אתו.

“And this is yours: the heave-offering of their gift, even all the wave-offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and to your sons and to your daughters with you, as a due for ever; every one that is clean in your house may eat thereof” (Num 18:11; see also: Num 18:19).

Among other things this share will include:

כל-פטור רחם לכל-בשר אשר-יקריבו ליהוה, באדם ובבהמה-יהיה-לך: אך פדה תפדה את בכור האדם, ואת בכור-הבהמה הטמאה תפדה.
ופדויו מבן-חדש תפדה בערכך, כסף חמשת שקלים בשקל הקדש: עשרים גרה הוא אך בכור-שור או-בכור כשב או-בכור עז, לא תפדה-קדש הם: את-דמם תזרק על-המזבח, ואת-חלבם תקטיר-אשה לריח ניחח, ליהוה.
ובשרם יהיה-לך: כחזה התנופה וכשוק הימין לך יהיה.

“Everything that opens the womb, of all flesh which they offer to *YHWH*, both of man and beast, shall be yours; howbeit the first-born of man shall you surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shall you redeem.

And their redemption-money-from a month old shall you redeem them-shall be, according to your valuation, five shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary-the same is twenty gerahs.

But the firstling of an ox, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy: you shall dash their blood against the altar, and shall make their fat smoke for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savor to *YHWH*.

And the flesh of them shall be yours, as the wave-breast and as the right thigh, it shall be yours” (Num 18:15-18).

The content of these verses indicates that the words **פטור רחם** - “Everything that opens the womb” has the same meaning as: **בכור** - “the first-born.” This suggests the possibility that the word **פטור** (*petur*) is a ב (b) - פ (p) bilabial exchange and a letter-substitution error of **בכור** (*bechor*) - “first born.”

Now we read in the Book of Exodus:

וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר.

קדש-לי כל-בכור פטור כל-רחם, בבני ישראל-באדם ובבהמה: לי הוא.

“And *YHWH* spoke to Moses, saying:

Sanctify to Me all the first-born, whatsoever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast, it is Mine” (Ex 13:1-2; see also: Num 3:12; 8:16).

However, here the word **בכור** - “first born” could have been a late scribe’s insertion for explaining the “corrupt” word **פטר** - “opener (of the womb).” It seems that after inserting the “correction” in this verse, the late scribe deemed it un-necessary to insert the same correction also into other verses of the same book that contain the words **פטר רחם** - “**Everything that opens the womb**” (Ex 13:12, 15; 34:19; see also: Num 18:15; Eze 20:26).



Presentation of the First-born son. From Juedisches Ceremoniel .1724.

In the Book of Exodus we read:

והעברת כל-פטר-רחם ליהוה; וכל-פטר שגר בהמה, אשר יהיה לך הזכרים-ליהוה.
 וכל-פטר חמר תפדה בשה, ואם-לא תפדה וערפתו; וכל בכור אדם בבניך תפדה.

“And you shall set apart to *YHWH* all that opens the womb; and every firstling that is a male, which you have, coming of a beast, shall be *YHWH*’s.

And every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and all the first-born of man among your sons shall you redeem” (Ex 13:12-13; see also: Ex 34:19-20).

The English translation of **וּכְל־פֶּטֶר שִׁגְר בְּהֵמָה** to: “and every firstling that is a male, which you have, coming of a beast” does not adhere to the Hebrew version of these words, and is not supported by the Greek translator, who believed that the rare word **שגר** means “womb.”

Therefore it is suggested that **וּכְל־פֶּטֶר שִׁגְר בְּהֵמָה** means: “and all the first-born of the beast.” The last hemistich of this verse indicates that this command is only in regard to male newborns.

In addition, the comparison with verses Num 18:15-16, suggests that here the word **וערפתו** (*vaa'raphtho*) is a letter-substitution error of **וערכתו** (*vaa'rachtho*) - “and you should value it.”

In the Book of Exodus we also read: **כל-פטר רחם לי; וכל-מקנך תזכר, פטר שור ושה** - “All that opens the womb is Mine; and of all your cattle you shall sanctify the males, the firstlings of ox and sheep” (Ex 34:19).

It is not clear how the English translated the word **תזכר** to: “you shall sanctify the males” and this understanding is not supported by the Greek translator. However, the comparison with the

previously mentioned verses suggests that **תזכר** (*thizachar*) is a vowel letter-deletion and mis-division of **את הזכר** (*eth hazachar*) - “the male.”



“The redemption of the first-born son” A silver coin (26 gram) issued by the mint of the state of Israel. 1974