

## בחר - בכר - בקר - יקר

### אבנר רמו

In the Book of Isaiah we read: **“But thou, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen”** (Is 41:8; see also: Is 44:1-2).

The Chronicler wrote: **“for I have chosen him to be to Me for a son, and I will be to him for a father”** (1 Ch 28:6).

Now we read in the Book of Exodus:

**ואמרת אל-פרעה: כה אמר יהוה, בני בכרי ישראל  
ואמר אליך, שלח את-בני ויעבדני,**

**“And you shall say to Pharaoh: Thus said *YHWH*: Israel is My son, My first-born.  
And I have said to you: Let My son go, that he may serve Me”** (Ex 4:22-23).

The concept here of Israel being the firstborn son of God is rather odd and has no parallel in the Bible. However the comparison between these verses suggests that here **בכרי** (*bechori*) is a misspelled **בחרתי** (*bakharthi*) - “that I chose.”

The Chronicler wrote:

**ובני ראובן בכור-ישראל, כי הוא הבכור-ובחללו יצועי אביו, נתנה בכרתו לבני יוסף בן-  
ישראל; ולא להתיחש לבכרה  
כי יהודה גבר באחיו, ולנגיד ממנו; והבכרה ליוסף.**

**“And the sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel--for he was the first-born; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, yet not so that he was to be reckoned in the genealogy as first-born. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came he that is the prince; but the birthright was Joseph's”** (1 Ch 5:1-2).

In the Book of Jeremiah we read:

**בבכי יבאו, ובתחנונים אובילים-אוליכם אל-נחלי מים, בדרך ישר לא יכשלו בה: כי-הייתי  
לישראל לאב, ואפרים בכרי הוא.**

**“They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them; I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born”** (Jer 31:8).

Yet the Psalmist wrote:

**וימאס באהל יוסף; ובשבט אפרים לא בחר.  
ויבחר את-שבט יהודה; את-הר ציון אשר אהב.**

**“Moreover He abhorred the tent of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim;  
And chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved”** (Ps 78:67-68).

Here again it appears uncertain whether Ephraim should be considered as a **בכר** (*bechor*) - “firstborn” or “preferred” (e.g. Deu 21:16), or **בחר** (*bakhar*) - “chosen.”

In the Book of Isaiah we read: **כי בטרם ידע הנער, מאס ברע-ובחר בטוב** - “before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good” (Is 7:16).

Now in the Book of Leviticus we read: **לא יבקר בין-טוב לרע, ולא ימירנו** - “He shall not inquire whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it” (Lev 27:33).

It is not clear how the English translator determined that here **יבקר** (*yevaquer*) means “Inquire.” The Greek translator wrote “exchange” but the content of this verse suggests that **יבקר** (*yevaquer*) is a variant of **יבחר** (*yekhar*) - “will choose.”

This comparison is relevant for the reading in the Book of Jeremiah: **הבן יקיר לי אפרים** - “Is Ephraim a darling son to Me?” (Jer 31:19).

Here, **יקיר** (*yaqir*) may have the same meaning as **בכיר** (*bachir*) - “preferred” (e.g. Deu 21:16) or **בחיר** (*bakhir*) - “chosen” as in: **למען עבדי יעקב, וישראל בחירי** - “For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My elect” (Is 45:4; see also: Ps 105:6; 1 Ch 16:13).

On the other hand, we read in the Book of Isaiah:

**ונודע בגוים זרעם, וצאצאיהם בתוך העמים; כל-ראיהם יכירום, כי הם זרע ברך יהוה.**  
“And their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which *YHWH* had blessed” (Is 61:9).

However, the content of this verse suggests that here **יכירום** (*yakirum*) is a misspelled **יקירום** (*yoqirum*) - “will value them” (e.g. Is 13:12).

Similarly, in the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

**כי יהוה אלהיכם-הוא אלהי האלהים, ואדני האדנים: האל הגדל הגבר והנורא, אשר לא-ישא פנים, ולא יקח שחד.**  
“For *YHWH* your God, He is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty, and the awful, who regards not persons, nor taketh reward” (Deu 10:17; see also: 1 Ki 5:1; Is 3:3; 9:14; Job 22:8).

Yet in the Book of Deuteronomy we also find:

**שפטים ושטרים תתן-לך בכל-שעריך אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך לשבטיך; ושפטו את-העם, משפט-צדק.**  
**לא-תטה משפט, לא תכיר פנים; ולא-תקח שחד**  
“Judges and officers shall you make thee in all thy gates, which *YHWH* your God gives you, tribe by tribe; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.  
**You shall not wrest judgment; you shall not respect persons; neither shall you take a gift**” (Deu 16:18-19; see also: Deu 1:17; Pro 24:23; 28:21).

Yet the meaning of this verse suggests that here **תכיר** (*thakir*) is a misspelled **תקיר** (*thoqir*) - “give value to.”

Similarly, in the Book of Job we find:

אשר לא-נשא פני שרים, ולא נכר-שוע לפני-דל: כי-מעשה ידיו כלם.

“That respects not the persons of princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor: For they all are the work of His hands” (Job 34:19).

However, the comparison to the previous verses suggests that here **נכר** (*nikar*) is a letter-substitution error of **בכר** (*biker*) - “preferred” (e.g. Deu 21:16).