

ילד או נער?

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אבנר רמו

In the Book of Exodus we read about the mother of the three month-old Moses:

ולא-יכלה עוד הצפינו, ותקח-לו תבת גמא, ותחמרה בחמר ובזפת; ותשם בה את-הילד, ותשם בסוף על-שפת היאר.

“And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch; and she put the child therein, and laid it in the flags by the river's brink” (Ex 2:3).



The finding of Moses. By Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. 1740. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Yet two verses later we read:

ותרד בת-פרעה לרחץ על-היאר, ונערתייה הלכת על-יד היאר; ותרא את-התבה בתוך הסוף, ותשלח את-אמתה ותקחה.

ותפתח ותראהו את-הילד, והנה-נער בכה; ותחמל עליו-ותאמר, מילדי העברים זה.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it.

And she opened it, and saw the child; and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: This is one of the Hebrews' children” (Ex 2:5-6).

The Greek translator wrote here: “Now when she opened it she saw a child crying in the basket. And Pharaoh's daughter spared it and said: This is one of the Hebrews' children.”

The word **נער** (*naa'r*) appears in the Bible multiple times, and usually it means a teenager or a young adult. However, it is possible that early on this term was fully synonymous with **ילד** (*yeled*) - “child” and only in a later period its meaning was restricted to a “lad.”

It is therefore suggested that when a late scribe read here: **והנה-נער בכה** - “and behold a boy that wept” he inserted just prior to it the explanatory **את-הילד** - “the child” to indicate that Moses was then just a three month-old baby and not a teenager. This insertion had turned the word **ותראהו** - “and she saw him (the child) to grammatically incorrect. It appears that the Greek translator understood that here is a scribal correction, and he omitted from the translation the word **נער** (*naa'r*).

This is not the first time that the terms **ילד** (*yeled*) - “child” and **נער** (*naa'r*) - “lad” had troubled the biblical scribes.



The expulsion of Hagar and Ismael. By Gustave Dore (1832-1883).

After Isaac was weaned (probably when he was 2-3 years old), Sarah convinced her husband to send away Hagar and her son. Now we read:

**וישכם אברהם בבקר ויקח-לחם וחמת מים ויתן אל-הגר שם על-שכמה, ואת-הילד-
וישלחה; ותלך ותתע במדבר באר שבע.
ויכלו המים מן-החמת; ותשלך את-הילד תחת אחד השיחים.
ותלך ותשב לה מנגד, הרחק כמטחוי קשת, כי אמרה, אל-אראה במות הילד; ותשב מנגד
ותשא את-קלה ותבך.**

“And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for she said: Let me not look upon the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept” (Gen 21:14-16).

However, in the next verses we find:

וישמע אלהים את-קול הנער, ויקרא מלאך אלהים אל-הגר מן-השמים, ויאמר לה מה-לך הגר; אל-תיראי כי-שמע אלהים אל-קול הנער באשר הוא-שם. קומי שאי את-הנער והחזיקי את-ידך בו: כי-לגוי גדול, אשימנו. ויפקח אלהים את-עיניה ותרא באר מים; ותלך ותמלא את-החמת מים, ותשק את-הנער ויהי אלהים את-הנער ויגדל; וישב במדבר, ויהי רבה קשת.

“And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her: What ailed you, Hagar? Fear not; for God had heard the voice of the lad where he is.

Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast by your hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer” (Gen 21:17-20).

We do not know how many children Hagar bore to Abraham and although in the above narrative Hagar’s son name is not mentioned we get the impression that this son of Hagar is Ishmael. However, the biblical information suggests that when Hagar and her son were sent away, Ishmael must have been 16 or 17 years old. In that case we have to wonder why Abraham gave the bread and the container of water to Hagar and not to this lad? Furthermore, it appears unrealistic that Hagar could have “cast” a seventeen-year old lad under one of the shrubs.

Furthermore, we suggest that verse Gen 21:14 is grammatically malformed because someone changed the original that read:

וישכם אברהם בבקר ויקח-לחם וחמת מים ויתן אל-הגר ואת-הילד שם על-שכמה, וישלחה
“And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, and he put the child on her shoulder.”

Now, assuming that this son of Hagar was Ishmael, a late scribe that read this verse knew that Hagar could not carry on her shoulder a seventeen year old lad, and he therefore “changed” the order of the words of this verse to:

וישכם אברהם בבקר ויקח-לחם וחמת מים ויתן אל-הגר שם על-שכמה, ואת-הילד-
וישלחה;

“And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away” (Gen 21:14).

Although this verse now has unusual grammar, it “solved” the problem of whether this son of Hagar was a little boy or a grown up lad.