נצל piel

(For fuller discussion of the lexical field as a whole see the 'Overview of SAHD entries for "Deliverance" words' on this site)

Introduction

Grammatical Type: vb piel.
Occurrences: Total 4x OT, 0x Sir, 0x Qum, 0x inscr.
Text doubtful:
A.1 [nil]

B.1 At Ezk 14.14 the piel יְנַצְּלוּ נַפְשָׁם is translated in the LXX as a passive (and without a direct object). The LXX and MS S of OL imply a niphal (Cooke 1936:156; Zimmerli 1979:310), but the LXX should perhaps not be followed (cf. its passive rendering of the hiphil in verse 16). There are similar differences between the MT and the LXX in the case of the piel of מלט (Am 2.15b; Ps 33.17) and so this may be part of a wider 'corrective' by the LXX. The Vg, Pesh and Tg of Ezk 14.14 all render as the MT with a direct object. Since this would be the only instance where the piel denotes 'to save' rather than 'to plunder' some scholars wish to emend the verb to a hiphil (e.g. Cooke 1936:156; Fohrer 1955:77; cf. BHS). Moreover, verses 16 and 18 contain the hiphil (although without a direct object) and verse 20 has the hiphil followed by the direct object נפשׁ. Greenberg notes that the piel occurs too rarely for the meaning 'to save' to be rejected with confidence (1983:258; cf. Bertholet 1897:76). He also notes how a hiphil-piel sequence in verse 13 and 14 (נצֵּל / הִשְׁלַח) is answered by a piel-hiphil sequence in verses 19/21 and 20 (נצֵּל / הִשְׁלִיחַ). Also on the principle of *lectio difficilior* the piel is to be preferred.

Qere/Ketiv: none.

1. Root and Comparative Material
A.1 [See נצל hiphil]

2. Formal Characteristics
A.1 [See נצל hiphil]

3. Syntagmatics
A.1 The subject of נצל piel is 2ppl pron = the Israelites (Ex 3.22), הָעָם 'the people' (Ex 12.36), הָאֲנָשִׁים 'the men [Noah, Daniel and Job]' (Ezk 14.14) and יְהוֹשָׁפָט וְעַמּוֹ 'Jehoshaphat and his people' (2Ch 20.25).
A.2 The direct object of נצל piel is מִצְרַיִם 'the Egyptians' (Ex 3.22; 12.36) and נֶפֶשׁ 'life' (Ezk 14.14). In 2Ch 20.25 the object 'livestock etc.' can be understood from the previous clause.
A.3 The indirect object of נצל piel is expressed by בְּ + צְדָקָה 'righteousness' (Ezk 14.14).
A.4 A reflexive 'for themselves' is provided by the addition of לָהֶם after נצל piel (2Ch 20.25).

4. Versions
a. LXX: σκυλεύω (Ex 3.22; 12.36; 2Ch 20.25); σῴζω [passive] (Ezk 14.14);

Minor Greek Versions **[MRN]**:

b. Peshitta: *pṣ ʾ* (Ezk 14.14); *šql* (2Ch 20.25); *ḥlṣ* (Ex 12.36); *npṣ* (Ex 3.22);

c. Targum: רוק (Ex 3.22; 12.36; 2Ch 20.25); שׁיזב (Ezk 14.14);

d. Vulgate: *diripio* (2Ch 20.25); *spolio* (Ex 3.22; 12.36); *libero* (Ezk 14.14).

A.1 Le Boulluec 1989:95 notes some of the interpretations given to σκυλεύω in Ex 3.22 and 12.36 by Philo and the early Fathers, which is valuable evidence for the original reading of LXX.

B.1 HR give an equivalent συσκευάζω at Ex 3.22, but this has been corrected by Muraoka (*Index*:99) to σκυλεύω, as it appears to be a secondary development in the Greek translation there (cf. Wevers 1990:39, 187).

5. Lexical/Semantic Field(s)
A.1 [See נצל hiphil]
A.2 [See נצל hitpael] In view of the close similarity between the contexts in which נצל and פרק are used in the hitpael, the piel forms of these verbs probably belong to the same lexical field (see esp. Ex 32.2).

6. Exegesis
A.1 In three (Ex 3.22; 12.36; 2Ch 20.25) of its four occurrences נצל piel is used of the removal of another person's property, as in a significant minority of the occurrences of נצל hiphil (see the accompanying entry on this, Exegesis A.3), e.g. Gn 31.9, 16; Ho 2.11: compare also the corresponding reflexive meaning of the hitpael in Ex 33.6. The context of 2Ch 20.25 is the 'plundering' of a defeated enemy and the sense 'plunder' is commonly presumed also in Ex 3.22; 12.36 (cf. the Versions and *HAL*'s 'ausrauben' [677]), since the Egyptians' oppression of Israel has made them enemies (cf. Ex 15.6). The meaning 'save' (Jacob:356-359; Fischer:168) is certainly inappropriate, but a less militaristic sense such as 'stripped' or 'appropriated the property of' might be possible here. Even in 2Ch 20.25 'took away' could be all that נצל piel itself conveys (cf. Vriezen:397-399), with other elements of the context defining the event more precisely (cf. שׁלל).
A.2 In one instance נצל piel denotes 'to save' or 'retten' (*HAL*:677), where it is followed by the direct object נֶפֶשׁ 'life' (Ezk 14.14). The piel of מלט is likewise frequently followed by נֶפֶשׁ to denote the saving of someone's life.
A.3 For the meaning of the piel see Jenni 1968:240.

B.1 Ehrlich follows Jr 46.2 and takes נַפְשָׁם at Ezk 14.14 as "they themselves" (1968:49), having accepted the emendation to a niphal (see Introduction, Text Doubtful B.1). Alternatively it might be taken as an interpretative addition to indicate at the start that the pious save only their own lives (cf. Zimmerli 1979:310).
B.2 Gradwohl has argued that נצל piel in Ex 3.22 and 12.36 does not mean "plunder" but is a technical term from the law concerning slaves. The occurrence of ריקם in 3.21 as in the law of emancipation in Dt 15.13 provides a verbal connection and the frequent reference to the Israelites' עבודה "bondage" in Egypt makes such a

connection plausible. The explicit reference to Israel's status as an עֶבֶד in Egypt in Dt 15.15 is especially important (1999:193). Nevertheless it is very difficult to give נצל piel a convincing legal meaning in the Exodus contexts where the Egyptians are the direct object. Gradwohl's suggestion of "cause [them] to pay the reward owed" is too far removed from other uses of נצל to establish a valid semantic development. The uses of נצל hiphil in Gn 31 provide no support for Gradwohl's view (see Exegesis B.1 in that entry). If an alternative to "plunder" is to be found, it will need to be closer to the actual meaning in Gn 31 (and perhaps other occurrences of the verb): see above A.1.

7. Conclusion
In the majority of the occurrences of נצל piel (all in prose) it has the physical sense of stripping. In one instance (and that in prophetic literature) it has the sense of 'to save'. The ancient versions also preserve this distinction.

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