

MISCELLANEOUS
BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LOST LEXEMES CLARIFY
JOHN 11:33 AND 11:38

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XVI

LOST LEXEMES CLARIFY

JOHN 11:33 AND 11:38

In Chapter XII two lost Hebrew lexemes were identified. First of the two was the textual variant εἰκη “without cause” in Matt 5:22 which originated when the word אָנִי in Matthew’s Hebrew text was mistakenly read as אָנִי “for no reason” when it should have been read as אָנִי “obscenely,” which comes from אָנִי, stem III, the cognate of the Arabic خنى (*ḥanaya*) “he uttered foul, abominable, unseemly, or obscene speech” (Lane 1865: 819). Second, the untranslated Πηκά (= אָנִי) in 5:22 was recognized as the cognate of the Arabic رقيق (*raqiq*) “a slave” (Lane 1867: 1131). Thus, the relevant lines in Matt 5:22 state, “Whoever is *obscenely* angry with his brother shall be in danger of the court: and he who says to his brother “*Vile-Fool-Slave*” shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin.”

The focus in Chapter XIV was on the recovery in the 20th century of the lost lexeme אָנִי “verily, indeed,” which over the centuries was always read as the negative particle אָנִי “no, not.” Once אָנִי “indeed” is in focus, Jesus’ commanding some whom he healed *not* to tell anyone (as if they could hide their healing) can be interpreted as commands to *indeed* tell everyone (which was obediently followed). Thus, Jesus’ alleged desire for a “messianic secret” can be recognized as his desire for “messianic publicity”—which is exactly what happened.

The two lost Hebrew lexemes introduced in Chapter XV were אָנִי “to be angry” and אָנִי “to do a second time, to do again.” The former involved the Greek textual variants which report that Jesus *became angry* with the leper whom he

healed (Mark1:41). The Hebrew לָמַח “to be angry” is the cognate of Arabic حمل (*ḥamala*), stem II, “he became angry” (forms 1 and 8) (Lane 1865: 647), which was easily confused with רָחַם, stem I, “to have compassion.” The lost lexeme עָלַל “to do again” involved John 3:3, where Nicodemus understood Jesus to have said that *he must be born again*.

In this chapter the focus of attention shifts to John 11:33 and 11:38, where the lost lexemes (a) אָזַח “to become assertive, to assume responsibility,” and (b) פָּרַח “to act promptly” clarify the Greek texts which report that Jesus became angry just before he raised Lazarus from the dead.

The Greek text of John 11:33 and the literal translation of Ramsey Michaels (1989: 206) read:

ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν
He became angry in his spirit, and shook himself.

Michaels commented briefly,

. . . the Greek verbs used unmistakably denote anger and agitation. Whether the agitation (or “shaking”) is physical as well as emotional is difficult to say. The active voice (“he shook himself”) suggests that it is. The anger seems to be on the inside, while the shaking or trembling is the outward expression of it.¹

Most translation have soften the statement that Jesus became angry with Mary and Martha. Here are five examples,

- KJV: he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled
- NAS: he was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled
- NAB: he became perturbed and deeply troubled
- NRS: he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved
- NLT: he was moved with indignation and was deeply troubled.

The Peshitta reads אַתְּעִזּוּ בְרוּחָהּ וְאַזְיַע נַפְשָׁהּ, which George Lamsa (1933, 1967) translated as “he was moved in his spirit and greatly disturbed.” The Vulgate reads *plorantes fremuit spiritu et turbavit se ipsum*, which became in the DRA, “he groaned in the spirit and troubled himself.”

The verb ταραύσσω (aorist active indicative ἐτάραξευ) “to shake, stir up, disturb, throw into confusion, agitate” (Arndt and Gingrich 1957: 812) appears in the Septuagint as the translator’s choice for forty-six different Hebrew words in more than ninety verses (Hatch and Redpath 1954: 1336). By contrast, the ἐμβριμάομαι (aorist middle indicative of ἐνεβριμήσατο) “to admonish urgently, to rebuke” (which is related to βριμάομαι “to snort with anger, to be indignant”)² appears only twice in the Septuagint, namely in

- Dan 11:30, where the ἐμβριμήσονται αὐτῶ translates נִכְאָה “he had been disheartened”; and in
- Lam 2:6, וַיִּנְאֵץ בְּזַעַם־אָפוֹ מֶלֶךְ וְכֹהֵן, which became καὶ παρώξυνεν ἐμβριμήματι ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλέα καὶ ἱερέα καὶ ἄρχοντα, “and he vexed with the *indignation* of his anger king and priest and chief.”

C. C. Torrey (1936: 41–43) suggested that in John 11:33 and 38 the translator selected the wrong meaning of the ambiguous Aramaic ܢܝܢܐ, which can mean “to be angry” or “to be deeply moved” (Jastrow 1903: 1447). But, as noted by C. K. Barrett (1955: 333), Matthew Black (1946: 174–177) rejected this proposal, asking the question, “If ܢܝܢܐ was the original, why did a translator go out of his way to select so unusual an expression in Greek?”

Barrett concurred with the interpretation of Matthew Black, whose conclusion he quoted at length:

The assumption of an Aramaic source of which the two expressions [ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι and ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν] are ‘translation-variants’ can account for the Johannine Greek. The Aramaic equivalent of ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν is a reflexive form of the verb *za^c*; in Esther 4:4, . . . the verb here [לָחַלְחַלְחַתָּהּ] is a very strong one in Hebrew; it means literally ‘she writhed with anxiety’; it is rendered in the Targum by the equally strong and expressive verb *za^c*; the LXX renders ἐταράχθη. The latter was selected by the Greek translator of the Aramaic of John 11:33, but he set alongside it the Syriac expression ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι, an even more expressive equivalent of the Aramaic, and rendered the same verb *za^c* in v. 38 by the Greek equivalent of the corresponding Syriac *ʿth^cazaz*.

Barrett’s conclusion was, “This [interpretation of Black] though somewhat complicated by the introduction of Syriac as well as Aramaic, is probably the best solution of the problem, if any linguistic problem really exists. Barrett (1955: 332–333) suggested that John 11:33 contributed to John’s version of the desire of Jesus for a “messianic secret.”

Jesus perceives that the presence and grief of the sisters and the Jews are almost forcing a miracle upon him, and as in 2.4 the request for miraculous activity evokes a firm, almost tough, answer, here, in circumstances of increased tension it arouses his wrath. The miracle will be impossible to hide (cf. vv 28, 30); and this miracle, Jesus perceives, will be the immediate occasion of his death (vv. 49–53).

Raymond Brown (1966: 425) translated the ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι in 11:33 as “shuddered, moved with deepest emotions,” noting that this word and the ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ in John 11:38

are Semitisms for expressing the internal impact of emotions.

The basic meaning of *embrimasthai* seems to imply an articulate expression of anger. In LXX, the verb, along with its cognates, is used to describe a display of indignation (e.g., Dan xi 30), and this usage is also found in Mark xiv 5. The verb also describes Jesus’s reaction to the afflicted (Mark I 43; Matt ix 30). In these latter instances does the verb express anger? While it does not seem that Jesus would have been angry at the afflicted, he may very well have been angry at their illness and handicaps which were looked on as manifestations of Satan’s kingdom of evil.

Similarly Leon Morris (1971: 557) noted, “It is moreover completely out of character for Jesus to give way to anger against friends who, even if misguided, sought him no harm.”

To the question asked by Raymond Brown in the quotation above, “In these latter instances does the verb [ἐνεβριμήσατο] express anger?” my reply would be “Yes” if speaking strictly of the Greek verb. But, if the question was about the verb in the Hebrew *Vorlage*, my answer would be an emphatic “No!”

Taking a clue from Lam 2:6, where the MT בְּזַעַם־אָפוֹ was translated in the Septuagint as ἐμβριμήματι ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ, “the indignation of his anger,” the phrase in John 11:33, ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτόν, “he became angry in his spirit, and shook himself,” can be retroverted into Hebrew as זַעַם זַעַם זַעַם רוח and vocalized as זַעַם רוח (rather than רוח זַעַם זַעַם). Obviously, when the phrase was translated into Greek the reader saw here the well attested

זַעַף, stem I, “to be indignant, to be angry,” and the widely attested רִיחַ, stem I, “wind, breath, spirit” (BDB 276, 924; Jastrow 408, 1458). But there was also זַעַף, stem II, “to be assertive” and רִיחַ, stem II, “to act quickly, promptly.” Unfortunately, both זַעַף, stem II, and רִיחַ, stem II, became lost lexemes. But, thanks to Arabic cognates, they have been recovered and permit a very reasonable reinterpretation of John 11:33 and 11:38.

The Arabic cognate of Hebrew זַעַף, stem II, is زعم (*za^cama*) “he asserted” and “he became responsible, answerable, amenable, surety, or guarantee for it”—with the noun زعمة (*za^cmat*) “an assertion,” the adjective زعيم (*za^cim*) “responsible” (Lane 1867: 1232–1233). Two phrases cited by Lane are of particular interest, namely, تزاعم القوم (*taza^cam °alqawmu*) “the people became responsible for one another,” and زعم زعما (*za^cama za^cman*) “he related a piece of information respecting which there is doubt.”

The Arabic cognate of Hebrew רִיחַ, stem II, is راح / روح (*rwh / râḥa*) “he was active, prompt, quick,” with the adjectives رواح (*rawâḥ*) and رواحة (*rawâḥat*) meaning,

- “experiencing relief from grief or sorrow, after suffering therefrom;
- experiencing the joy, or happiness, rising from certainty;
- quick or prompt to do acts of kindness;
- very brisk, prompt, or quick.

The phrase ارياح له (*°aryâḥa lah*) means “he was prompt to do what was kind or beneficent” or “he inclined to, and loved, kindness or beneficence” (Lane 1867: 1177–1182).

With these definitions in focus, the זעם זעם ררר , which was very likely to have been the last phrase in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of John 11:33, can be translated as

- זע “*being assertive*” (an infinitive absolute [GKC § 113] which was mistranslated as ἐνεβριμήσατο “he became angry”);
- זע “*he took responsibility upon himself*” (which was mistranslated as ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν “he troubled himself”);
- רר “*promptly*” (which was mistranslated as ᾧ πνεύματι “in the spirit).”

Thus, John 11:33–34 initially must have meant,

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, becoming assertive he immediately took full responsibility upon himself and asked, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

Similarly, the statement in John 11:38, Ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, traditionally translated as “then Jesus, again groaning in himself, came to the tomb,” initially must have meant, “*then Jesus, again asserting himself, came to the tomb.*”

Tucked between the two statements about Jesus’ asserting himself are the words ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus wept.” Lane (1867: 913) noted that دمع (*dam^c*) “tears” could be from grief or joy—“if from joy, it is cool; or if from grief, hot.” When Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) he shed the hot tears of grief as he foretold of the upcoming death and destruction of the city and her inhabitants. When he stood before Lazarus’ tomb he shed the cool tears of joy as he was about to bring his beloved friend Lazarus back from the dead.

Once informed of Lazarus' death, Jesus made some assertions, including,

- “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” (John 11:4)
- “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep.” (John 11:11)
- “Your brother shall rise again.” (John 11:23)
- “I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25–26)
- “Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:40)

Some, like Martha (John 11:27), in faith took Jesus *assertions* as *truths*—no doubt recalling Jesus' raising from the dead the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12ff). For Jesus, standing before dead Lazarus' tomb, the moment of *truth* and *proof* was again imminent. The resuscitation of Jairus' daughter was quite different, for according to Matt 9:24, Mark 5:39, and Luke 8:52, Jesus asserted, “the child is not dead but sleeping,” and he revived her from her coma. But with Lazarus, Jesus asserted, “Lazarus is dead!” (John 11:14); and he was probably dead longer than was the young man from Nain.

Jesus' delay in going to the Lazarus' home was deliberate. The delay meant that Lazarus would be in his tomb at least for four days, longer than the three days Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature (Matt 12:40). Once the tomb of Lazarus was opened his stench would prove that he was indeed dead. Thus, while Mary, Martha, and their friends were shedding their hot tears of grief, Jesus wept, shedding cool tears of joy—knowing that “this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it” (John 11:4). It was an exhilarating and euphoric moment, for in that

very moment Jesus' assertions would be validated. Thus, Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:41)

In that very moment Jesus' *assertions* became proven *truths*:

The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. (John 11:44–45)

For many the hot tears of grief promptly became the cool tears of joy—Lazarus was alive again and the Son of God was glorified! But there were others who valued *tradition* more than *truth*, and plans were initiated by Caiaphas and his council that Jesus, who had demonstrated his power over death, must now die because "it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (John 11:50).

CONCLUSION

The recovery of lost Hebrew lexemes, though speculative, can be very productive. In plain conversation with his disciples (John 11:13) and with Nicodemus (John 3:4) Jesus was clearly misunderstood. The possibility for misunderstanding increased significantly once Jesus' words were written in consonantal Aramaic / Hebrew with their multiple homographs. Moreover, while the current Aramaic / Hebrew lexicons are excellent, they are not inerrant. The lexemes אַעַם, stem II, and אַרַר, stem II, which are attested in Arabic, do not appear in any Aramaic

or Hebrew lexicon because they have not been recognized in the available literature. But once the assumption is made that these two lexemes were used in Hebrew, new interpretations spring forth which better fit the broader contexts of the text.

Thus, Jesus' alleged anger at Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus evaporates once אָזַע, stem II, "he asserted, he became responsible" comes into focus. So also Jesus' reported depression disappears once פָּרַח, stem II, "to act promptly" becomes a lexical option. The literal meaning of the Greek texts of John 11:33, 38 has led to much speculation—none of which is convincing unless the texts are *paraphrased* to mean "disturbed in spirit and deeply moved," or the like, which softens the plain meaning of Greek. The recovery in this study of three lost lexemes (אָזַע stem II, פָּרַח stem II, and עָוַר stem II [see note 1]) permits one to clarify some of the problems that persist when working only with the Greek text.

NOTES

1. According to the Greek text of Matt 9:30 Jesus became angry (καὶ ἐνεβριμήθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς) with the two blind men whom he had just healed. The Hebrew *Vorlage* may have read אָזַע בָּם וַיַּעַר, just as Salkinson (1894) translated it. If so, the early Greek translators of Matthew were aware of עָוַר, stem II, the cognate of the Arabic عَد (form 4) "to be angry" (Lane 1877: 2231a). This would explain why he used ἐνεβριμήθη "he became angry" rather than παρεκάλει "he exhorted," which would have translated עָוַר, stem I, "to exhort" (Jastrow 1903: 1048). In Chapter 14, above, pp. 233–234, it was argued that the harsh words were due to

mistranslations of Hebrew words. Note also pp. 113–117 in Volume IV, *Clarifying New Testament Aramaic Words and Names and the Shem Tob Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, available on line by clicking [HERE](#) and going to PDF pages 120–124. For Chapter 14, pp. 233–234 (= PDF pages 15–17), click [HERE](#).

2. See Liddell and Scott 1940: 330, 540 and Hatch and Redpath 1954: 455–456.