

CLARIFYING
BAFFLING
BIBLICAL PASSAGES

CHAPTER TWENTY

EZEKIEL WENT
“FLYING OFF
IN CIRCLES OF WIND”

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EZEKIEL WENT

“FLYING OFF IN CIRCLES OF WIND”

EZEKIEL 3:14

רוּחַ נִשְׁאַתָּנִי וַתִּקַּחנִי וַאֲלֹךְ מִרַ בַּחֲמַת רוּחִי
וַיִּרְדֵּי־יְהוָה עָלַי חֲזָקָה

So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away,
and I went *in bitterness*, in the *heat of my spirit*;
but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

(KJV)

The spirit which had lifted me up seized me,
and I went off *spiritually stirred*,
while the hand of the LORD rested heavily upon me.

(NAB)

A wind lifted me and took me,
and I went, bitter, my spirit raging,
overpowered by the hand of YHWH.

(Greenberg)

καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἔξῆρέν με καὶ ἀνέλαβέν με
καὶ ἐπορεύθην ἐν ὀρμῇ τοῦ πνεύματός μου
καὶ χεὶρ κυρίου ἐγένετο ἐπ' ἐμέ κραταιά

(Septuagint)

Then the blast lifted me up and bore me aloft
and I went by the impulse of my own spirit,
and the hand of the Lord upon me was strong.

(Thompson's Septuagint)

COMMENTARY

The MT מר “in bitterness” has generally been interpreted as the equivalent of the בְּמַר־נַפֶּשׁ “bitterness of soul” in Ezek 27:31.¹ However, it is probably from the stem מרא (BDB 597) found in Job 39:18, כָּעֵת בְּמָרוֹם תִּמְרֵיא, “when it spreads its plumes aloft (NRS),” as the verb of motion for the ostrich. It would be the cognate of Arabic مری (*maraya*) used for the movement of the wind and clouds (Lane: 1893: 3019). This meaning has the support of the Septuagint which has ὀρμη “rapid motion forwards, onset, assault, impulse” (Liddell and Scott: 1253).²

The MT בְּחַמַּת רוּחִי, “in the heat of my spirit,” has been considered similar to וְיָאֵת חַמַּת יְהוָה מִלְּאֵתִי, “I am full of the wrath of Yahweh,” in Jer 6:11. However, it is more likely the cognate of Arabic حوم / حام (*hûm / hâma*) used of the motion of birds flying or hovering in circles” (Lane 1865: 678), rather than from חמה “to be hot” (BDB 404; Jastrow 475).³

If the ך of רוּחִי were dropped as a dittography of the following ך of the וַיֵּר, the phrase would mean, “I went flying off in circles of wind.” Unless Ezekiel suffered from severe acrophobia, it is unlikely that he would have “bitterness of soul” when accompanying his spiritual host to old *Tel Abib*. Far from being depressed, as suggested by the KJV and the RSV, or “spiritually stirred” as proposed by the NAB, the text probably speaks of the physical means of transport (even if only in a vision or in the imagination) which carried him to the exiles along the Chebar River. Whatever acrophobia he may have had, his fear (*not* depression) was allayed because, while airborne, he was firmly gripped by the hand of God.

NOTES

1. See Cooke 1936: 42.
2. Zimmerli (1979: 94, 139) commented

What is described by the reference to the prophet's being lifted up and carried off by the spirit is his personal experience of returning home with his spirit aglow under the pressure of Yahweh's hand upon him. The objective language describes a subjective experience. A later interpreter has added to this the explanatory words "in bitterness."

Zimmerli offered no suggestion as to why a later interpreter would gloss "his spirit aglow" as "in bitterness." Although מַר is not reflected in the Septuagint, it can be retained—*lectio difficilior*—as original. The use of cognates makes its interpretation less difficult. On the loss of the א of מַרָּא, see GKC § 22^f.

3. The noun حوم (*hûm*) is also applied to wine, not for the warmth it gives to the body, but for the sensation of circular motion and dizziness it produces in the head.