

The Spirit Of God Moved On The Face Of The Waters

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And The Spirit Of God *Moved* Upon The Face Of The Waters

I have often said that learning to read the Bible in Hebrew is like being able to read in three dimensions when you could only read in two dimensions before. Nothing illustrates that more than the material in this article. For years I read the second verse of the book of Genesis in English without ever understanding the most remarkable subtlety hidden there. Oh, I noticed the language and I thought it was a little odd to say:

And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God *moved* upon the face of the waters. (Gen 1:2)

How strange it seemed to say God moved. How did he move? Did He walk, or swim? Did He sort of float in the air? In what way did He move, and why is that significant?

Now, this wasn't what you would call a burning question - only a curiosity. I would pause and think about the distinctive choice of words, but I would quickly move on to more pressing issues. Only after I learned to read in Hebrew did the marvelous meaning of that word *moved* come through.

I actually stumbled across the meaning in a commentary once, where it was rendered as *brooded*. But, it still did not register because for me *to brood* usually meant to worry or fret.

That made no sense at all. Why would the Creator worry over the face of the waters.

Later, when I delved into the meaning of the Hebrew word for moved, *m'rahaphet*, I learned that it means to *flutter or shake*. I discovered the word is also used in Deuteronomy 32:11 where the context is very clear.

As the eagle **stirs** up her nest, **flutters** (m'rahaphet) over her young, **spreads** abroad her wings...

Suddenly the meaning became clear for me. It was as if a 1000 watt light bulb was being turned on in my head. I knew I had witnessed that very thing many times.

Many years ago we had a flock of ducks in our back yard. There was a pond and we enjoyed having the ducks around. They were relaxing and entertaining to watch. It was especially interesting in the spring when the hens started to nest.

They were a domestic mallard mix. They looked like mallards except the shape of their heads. The drakes had the bright colors but the hens were just a mottled brownish color.

Her markings made it easy to be virtually invisible when nesting. She had a proclivity for sitting absolutely motionless on the nest, settled in and flattened out, with their head withdrawn and lying flat into their breast feathers so as not to present a typical duck profile. You could absolutely look directly at her and not see her unless you were really paying close attention. I have nearly stepped on a nesting hen many times because I didn't know she was there.

Though normally shy and skittish and unwilling to get too close, during nesting season she seemed to have nerves of steel. She wouldn't twitch or budge even when in danger, for fear of giving away the location of the nest. Only when the threat was sure and imminent, or when she was being harassed for her eggs would she abandon her nest. We, of course, did harass the hens occasionally in order to take some of the eggs to keep the duckling population in control. A hen could lay an egg a day until she accumulated as many as 15-16 eggs, before starting to set. We couldn't resist allowing them to hatch at least 3-4 eggs, just to see the cute little ducklings. You could tell when the hens began nesting because while they were normally with the flock, they simply vanished from sight. We knew then it was time to go nest hunting. Our yard was just too small to tolerate very many ducks, so each spring we searched for their nests so we could take some of the eggs.

When a hen began to set it was remarkable to see her on the nest, keeping her silent vigil for days and weeks, not moving a muscle. Only rarely would you notice her leave for a few minutes to eat or drink. She would masterfully cover the nest with leaves and grass to make it virtually invisible and to keep it warm in her brief absence. But soon she would be back for the next shift.

Incubation time was about a month. I never counted the days - I just waited to be surprised. Finally after days on end something seemed different. As I made the morning rounds, she no longer was snuggled down quietly in the nest. Something was changed about her posture. She now seemed to be sitting higher in the nest, almost hovering over it. Her head, no more hidden, was raised erect with pride, her wings slightly spread to cover more of the nest than before. As I look more closely, I could begin to see tiny pairs of inquisitive coal black eyes peering out curiously at me from beneath her wings, punctuated here and there by a small yellow and black bill. It was clear that the eggs were beginning to hatch.

She stayed in that posture for the next few hours or perhaps into the next day, until all the eggs hatched and the whole troop marched ceremoniously for the nearest water like so many tin soldiers. She would strut with pride having successfully accomplished the very purpose of her existence, obviously now aware of her changing role as teacher and protector.

But during the time she waited patiently over the nest, waiting for all the eggs to be hatched, a careful observer would notice something - something very subtle. As she held her slightly **outstretched wings** over the new brood, she would tremble or **flutter** ever so slightly (m'rahaphet), just like that eagle in Deuteronomy. Bird experts say this careful motion is intended to **stir** the air and keep the temperature just right for the new ducklings. Those precision movements reflect the meticulous focus and care that she now lavishes on the tiny downy creatures.

It was exactly this scene that is described in the very first verse of Genesis, when the Spirit of God brooded or fluttered over the face of the waters. What a magnificent metaphor this is for the meticulous planning, the tireless effort, the care, and the love that was exhibited at that moment. In taking that very first step to prepare the earth as a sort of nest for His own children, He made it into the ideal place for man to begin the adventure of life, to live out his collective human existence, to learn the lessons of history, and to grow into maturity and wisdom, until finally a time comes when he has taken on the character of his Parent, and the whole earth can be united in peace and harmony in the messianic kingdom. We have cause for optimism about the destiny of man. God will not let us fail. Though we may have many bitter lessons to learn, He has great things in mind for man in the future. With that kind of resource behind us, how can we fail?

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