Jer. iv 11-12 offers a curious set of interlocking problems. The essential content of the passage is not in doubt: it is a description of the sirocco wind as a metaphor for the destructive work of Yahweh in bringing the foe from the north. Nevertheless the passage offers syntactical problems which have always been puzzling, so that it has received a great variety of renderings and of emendations through the years, renderings and emendations which continue in my view to keep the passage out of focus. The central problem, I suggest, is that commentators and translators have assumed the passage to be prose, and in so doing have looked for the expected cues of Hebrew prose, which are really missing. With two simple revocalizations, and read as poetry, the passage is clarified and the imagery at the same time strengthened.

In the MT vss. 11-12 appear as follows:

11) bāʾēt habīʾ yēʾāmēr lāʾām-bāzreb welirʾālāyim
    rāʾāh sab ṣēʾāyim bammidbār derek batʾammi
    lōʾ lizrūt welōʾ lēḥābar
12) rāʾāh māʾē mēʾēlēh yābôʾ li
    ʾattā gam-ʾammi ʾaḏabbēr miʾšpāṭim ʾēḏām.

The meaning of vss. 11a and 12b, which serve as a kind of “envelope” in the brief passage, is not in doubt: “At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem,” and “Now I too shall pass judgment on them.” Nor is vs. 11b in doubt: “Not to winnow and not to cleanse.” But vs. 11a offers a baffling array of seven nominal items, only one of which is even marked with a preposition. It is clear that batʾammi is a construct phrase, but beyond this obvious fact, little is clear. Whether there is a caesura in the line, and if so, where; whether any of these words connect closely with the infinitives which follow; what derek means; what reference is made by mēʾēlēh; indeed what the whole syntactic nexus of those lines is, all have remained uncertain.

_Vetus Testamentum_, Vol. XXVI, Fasc. 1
The issues are not textual; the consonantal text, as I shall attempt to show, is sound. The text before us seems to have been the text set before the translators of the Versions. But the difficulties were apparent in ancient times, and the Versions do not aid us. The Vulgate is the most literal—Jerome translates word for word, supplying some connective tissue and interpretation: *Ventus urens in viis quae sunt in deserto viae filiae populi mei non ad ventilandum et ad purgandum, spiritus plenus ex his veniet mihi.* He thus takes *šépāyîm* to be adverbial (correctly, as I shall try to show). But he has introduced an ambiguity in his translation (intentionally or not): it is unclear whether he intends *viae* to be nominative plural, a resumptive nominative picking up *viis* in the previous clause ¹), or whether he intends it to be genitive singular, in which case we must assume that he took *bmdbr drk bt-šmy* to be a long construct chain (and so presumably read *bemidbar* ²). Further, he assumes two different winds, the first to destroy the people (*ventus*), the second to come “to me” (*spiritus*) ³). Finally, he takes *mêlleh* as referring back to *šépāyîm*. For all his care in translating, however, we must still judge his interpretation forced and unlikely.

The other Versions all assume that the phrase beginning with *derek* is the predicate of *rûâb* in a nominal clause (“a wind ... in the desert is the way of the daughter of my people”), and the fact that *rûâb* often means “spirit” reinforces this possibility: indeed since “the way of the daughter of my people” is a conventional idea, whereas “wind ... in the desert” is a relatively unconventional one, subject and predicate are virtually reversed (“the way of the daughter of my people is a wind ... in the desert”). This is the understanding of Targum Jonathan and the Pešīṭṭa; indeed in these Versions the metaphor has become a simile (“like a wind ... in the desert, so is the way of the daughter of my people”). The LXX is not as specific, moving uncertainly between guesswork and a word-by-word translation, but it was pointed in this direction; and the fact that the LXX translator evidently did not understand *šah* (*rûâb šah* is rendered *pneuma planēsōr*, “a spirit of wandering”) encourages this homiletical


²) So in the Clementine edition of the Vulgate: *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam* (Rome, 1947) and in the Douay translation.

³) See also his commentary on this point.