

Shayla: What animal is it in Proverbs 30:31?

Proverbs 30:29-31 KJV There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: (30) a lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; (31) a greyhound; an hee goeth also; and a king against whom there is no rising up.

Proverbs 30:29-31 HCSB Three things are stately in their stride, even four are stately in their walk: (30) a lion, which is mightiest among beasts and doesn't retreat before anything, (31) a strutting rooster, a goat, and a king at the head of his army.

Proverbs 30:29 NET There are three things that are magnificent in their step, four things that move about magnificently: (30) a lion, mightiest of the beasts, who does not retreat from anything; (31) a strutting rooster, a male goat, and a king with his army around him.

Proverbs 30:29-31 NASB There are three things which are stately in their march, even four which are stately when they walk: (30) the lion which is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any, (31) the strutting rooster, the male goat also, and a king when his army is with him.

Midrash:

The Hebrew word there is zarzir, a masculine noun which literally means “girt” or “girdled” and it always is found in association with “loins” in the Bible.¹ So we have an animal that is “girt in the loins”. Does that mean narrow waisted or does it mean an animal that has a band around its waist? There’s no clear reference. Some translators have suggested a greyhound because of its narrow waist, others zebras because they have stripes that look like they are wearing a girdle.

Due to the immediate association with the king amid his army, and because they are usually associated with girths and buckles (as evidenced in many sculptures at Persepolis) some have guessed that the allusion is to war horses .

However, the Targum,² the Chaldaic, Syriac, Arabic, LXX and Vulgate all have it as a large fighting cock strutting among his hens. Though I personally find it difficult to understand how “girt in the loins” relates to a fighting rooster, most modern translators lean toward that possibility. Perhaps there is a cultural reference here that has been lost in antiquity.

¹ Exodus 12:11; 1 Kings 2:5; 18:46; 20:32; 2 Kings 1:8; 4:29; 9:1; Job 12:18; 38:3; 40:7; Proverbs 31:17; Isaiah 5:27; 11:5; 20:2; 32:11; Jeremiah 1:17; 13:11; Ezekiel 23:15; Daniel 10:5; Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6; Luke 12:35; Ephesians 6:14; 1 Peter 1:13.

² An Aramaic translation written during the first millennium and thus much closer to the original.