

BABEL AND BIBLE.

THIRD AND LAST LECTURE.*

BY FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH.

II.

EVERY man who faces the facts with an unprejudiced mind will admit that the meaning of the idea of "sin," or, in other words, the sum of all that man is in duty bound before God and man to do or to avoid, is entirely the same in Babel as in the Old Testament. And the same agreement may be noted with reference to the *consequences of sin*.

No sin is hidden from the divine eye, none remains unpunished. The consequence of sin is the wrath of God which acts upon the sinner like a spell and works itself out in punishment of sickness and misery, poverty and persecution, destruction and death.⁸² The idea common to both Old and New Testaments that sickness and want are the wages of sin is exactly the Babylonian view, and, I might add, it is fortunate that this is the case. For it justifies us to a greater degree in investigating the problem as to whether or not the relation of cause and effect between sickness and sin may still be accepted in the light of later knowledge.

With penitent confession and tearful prayers the devout Babylonian seeks to appease God's wrath and to propitiate the heart of God, while he clings firmly to his confidence in God's fatherly compassion. All the Old Testament prayers from the depths of wretchedness and sin, as Ps. vi. 1, "O Yahveh, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure;" the cry, "O Lord, how long?" all the expressions of longing for freedom from the bondage of sin, and at the same time for an end to illness, misery and persecution, as well as for the blessing of length of

* Translated from the German by Lydia Gillingham Robinson. The beginning of this lecture appeared in the March number of *The Open Court*.

⁸² Ps. xxxviii. 3ff.; lxxxviii. 8 ff.; xc. 7 ff. *et passim*.

days in order to walk henceforth in righteousness in God's sight; all these professions of firm confidence in divine grace we read in the Babylonian prayers and psalms in varying styles of touching petition.

"O that the heart of the Lord would turn his wrath far from me!

O Lord! my sins are many, great are my transgressions,
O my God, my Goddess, whether known or unknown to me,
Many are my sins and great are my transgressions. . . .

I sought around about, but no one took my hand,
I wept, but there was none came near to comfort.

I cry aloud, but no one gives me ear,
Sorrowful, and overwhelmed, I can not look up.

Unto my compassionate God make I 'mid sighs my petition,
The feet of my Goddess I kiss and embrace (?) them.

O Lord, cause not thy servant to fall
Who lies in the pool of the mire³³—help him up!

The sins that I have committed, turn into mercies,
The misdeeds I have done, let the wind bear away,

My many wickednesses tear in pieces like a garment!

Yea, pardon all my misdemeanors, and I'll obey thy sovereign
power.

Incline towards me thy heart, like the heart of a mother,
Like a mother's or father's heart, incline Thou to me."

It goes without saying that in the Babylonian penitential psalms and prayers for the forgiveness, washing away, putting aside or saving from sin, the meaning of the prayer was first of all that the spell be broken and disappear, and that sickness, misfortune, misery and death, be driven from the body and from the house of the supplicant. Had it been otherwise the Babylonians would not have been human. But he grossly deceives himself and others who would maintain that Israel had a deeper, yea "infinitely deeper," conception of the nature of sin. If perchance it is held that the Babylonians experienced a deep conviction of sin simply on account of its outward consequences, this would gainsay the oft reiterated lamentations of the devout Babylonian which mention always the sufferings of the sin-sick soul as well as material hardships. Whence it appears that the Babylonian religion developed an especially tender and devout view as to man's faith concerning his relation to God, and the disruption of that relation by sin.

Every human being, the king no less than every other mortal, is the "child of his God." His God to whom he owes his life, has

³³ This is Dr. Delitzsch's rendering, "*Im Wasser des Schlammes liegend*," but Dr. Jastrow in *The History of Religions* interprets the same line as "overflowing with tears," explaining in a footnote that the literal meaning is "rushing water." (Tr.)

at the same time entered his being as his good spirit, guiding and protecting him. No more terrible blow can befall a human being—more terrible even than sickness and pain—than when because of his misdeeds his God (or in the case of the daughters of men, Goddess) departs from him and takes up an abode elsewhere. Such a literal abandonment by God and the resultant spiritual pangs are looked upon by the Babylonians as sin's most dreadful curse.

The sinner is dependant solely upon the grace of God, not only because in spite of rigorous self-examination he is often totally unaware of the sin he must confess, but because God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and sometimes man thinks objectionable what is pleasing in God's sight, and *vice versa*. As appears in IV R 10, 34b, "No one knows whether he is doing well (*udammik*) or ill (*ukallil*)"³⁴. But the Babylonian lives in the firm assurance of faith, that

"Fear of God—begets grace,
Sacrifice—strengthens life,
And prayer—redeems from sin."³⁵

Yes, the divinities are gracious and merciful, and gladly turn again to the repentant sinner. And this is especially true of Marduk whose favorite attribute is to awaken the dead, to revive anew the victims of death, and who is entirely devoted to deeds of mercy. The physician of both man's body and soul, he is one of the brightest and noblest figures of the Babylonian pantheon. But all the other great gods are also looked upon as moral powers. The god Shamash, the sun-god, is called the "King of Justice." He is the righteous and incorruptible judge whose eye penetrates into the most hidden depths, and as it is said of Yahveh (Ps. lxxxv. 13): "Righteousness shall go before him and shall set us in the way of his steps,"³⁶ or (Ps. xcvi. 2) "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," so at all times the divinities "Judgment" and "Righteousness" stand before the Babylonian sun-god (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 15). And what a noble and lofty idea must have been connected with Marduk's son Nebo that he should have been designated and worshiped as the "Light of Truth."

It is very clear from the above that the Babylonian gods, too, were *living* powers. In regard to this point we must learn all over again from the beginning. The Old Testament's mocking descrip-

³⁴ Cf. IV R 60*.

³⁵ K. 7897. Z. 20-22.

³⁶ The emendation from *vayashem* (Ps. lxxxv. 13) to *vayashar* (parallel *Tsedek*) is required by the context.

tion of the Assyrio-Babylonian gods as idols of wood and stone, manufactured by human hands, (e. g. Deut. iv. 28, Is. xliv. 9 ff. and xlvi. 1-2), harps on an external of Babylonian worship. As our excavations have proved, the Holy of Holies (*adytum*) of the Babylonian temple was so tiny a room that sometimes it was entirely filled by the pedestal of the god's statue and hardly permitted one priest any freedom of motion. The image as such, accordingly, could not be intended as an object of worship on the part of the people, but it must rather have designated symbolically the place where the deity had especially chosen to dwell among men, particularly with his own people, and in order that he might surely be found at all times. Just as Yahveh, the God of Israel, when the center of power was established in Jerusalem, and Solomon had built his temple upon Zion, chose Jerusalem for his earthly abiding place (1 Kings viii. 44, 48; xi. 13 *et passim*) and the temple on Zion for the house where his power dwelt; so Marduk selected the city of Babylon as the seat of his splendor, and the temple Esagila for the house that was dear to him. Man feels most near the divine when in the earthly house of deity. Therefore as the Hebrew singer longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of Yahveh, so one devout Babylonian petitions in his evening prayer that he may be transported to Esagila, the sanctuary of Marduk.

The removal of the image of a Babylonian god by the hands of an enemy, or the entire destruction of a shrine, was accordingly an infallible sign that the deity was angry and had withdrawn into the heavens. When the divine wrath subsided the god came back to his dwelling place here below, just as Yahveh returned to his city, and to his land and people after the exile was over. It was natural for a simple people to feel a certain veneration for the serious and dignified images of the gods when they were carried forth in solemn procession, and even for the smaller statuettes which may have been sold to believers by the temple authorities. But this image worship was by no means the kernel of the Babylonian religion as even the prophets of Judæa knew of a mysterious mountain of God in the north upon which the Babylonian gods dwelt (Is. xiv. 13; Cf. Ez. xxviii. 14, 16) and clearly recognized the difference between the gods themselves, and their "modes of representation" on earth. In an article entitled "The Towers of Zion" in a Catholic periodical (*Zwanzigstes Jahrhundert*, March 14, 1903) we read:

"It is superfluous in these days to prove the justification of the use of images. Only let this fact be borne in mind. Corresponding

to the spiritualized sensuous nature of man, the use of images as means of representation of transcendental truths is entirely in accordance with reason, and the esteem in which they are held, or comparative worship, is psychologically well founded." In the same way the Babylonian image worship may be justified.³⁷

It could not well be otherwise than that the powers and manifestations of the living deity should seem as living deities, since each was individually personified. And so the Assyrio-Babylonian gods differ in no particular as far as their *attributes* are concerned from Yahveh, the God of Israel. They, too, do whatsoever they please in heaven and in earth, in the seas and all deep places (Ps. cxxxv. 6). As the mountains melt like wax before Yahveh, so the word of the gods levels mountains to the ground. Marduk commands and it is done, and as in Nahum (i. 4) we read of Yahveh's word of wrath and power,

"He bebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry
And drieth up all the rivers;
Bashan languisheth and Carmel,
And the flower of Lebanon languisheth;"

so also as a surprising coincidence we find in a psalm to Marduk,

"Thy word is an exalted net, o'er heaven and earth extended;
It cometh over the sea and the sea recedeth backwards,
It cometh over the meadow and the meadow lamenteth,
It cometh over the flood of Euphrates' waters,
And thy word, O Marduk, troubleth the bed of the river (?)."

The Babylonian gods, too, let their word pass through heaven and earth now in a breath of wind, now in the blast of a storm, and "speak" to men, especially to their chosen prophets and seers.

The gods see all and know all; their glance penetrates into the deepest secrets; they observe the paths of nations just as they examine the heart and try the reins of each individual; they are present with every person. Therefore the Babylonian lived in the firm belief that his god heard his fervent supplication and received him into his favor. "Prayer-answering, petition-granting," were favorite epithets of the Assyrio-Babylonian deities. Every day and many times every day the Babylonian raised his hands to the gods, full of confidence that they were at all times able and ready to grant their gracious aid, and I do not know that the power of prayer can be expressed in more beautiful words than we read on the Assyrian clay tablet to which frequent reference has previously been made (K. 7897):

³⁷ Cf. *Babel and Bible*, p. 106. Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1903.

"Prayer, supplication and worship
 Thou should'st offer at early morn, and thy strength will increase,
 And they will lead thee with God until the end."

To repeat, man is entirely dependent upon divine mercy from his entrance into life until its close, whence it becomes him to walk in humility. Joyfully welcomed by his parents as the gift of divine grace, every child, whether boy or girl, travels the path of life under the protection of God. As it is said in Job (xiv. 6),³⁸ "Look away from him, and all is over with him," so we read the reverse in the cuneiform tablets, "If thou, O goddess lookst graciously upon him, he will surely live;" (K. 101, Obv.) or, "Wherever thou lookst, there the dead live again, the sick recovers; what is wrong becomes right when thy countenance is seen." (26187 Z 40 ff.) And the best benediction which the parting Babylonian priest could and did leave with the sick or suffering, sounds very like the expression from Psalms (xxxii. 5) with which Jesus closed his eyes upon the cross, "Commit thyself into the gracious hands of thy God."

As we have seen, the ethical and the religious feeling of the Babylonian nation did not suffer in spite of the polytheistic character of its faith and cult. Instead, we find in all main points a far-reaching unity between them and the Israelites. Indeed, even with reference to the regard felt for the sacrificial system, that "heathenish" feature which chung also to the religion of Yahveh, we meet with a remarkable parallel. It is justly considered as an instance of enlightenment of certain isolated Israelitish singers and prophets, when Hosea (vi. 6) causes Yahveh to say: "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," or when the singer of the fiftieth psalm in the second century before Christ, one who developed religion in the fullest sense of the word, represents God as denouncing in vigorous language the official ritual of sacrifices, and pronounces thanksgiving and vows to be the offering most pleasing in God's sight. The most significant portion of the chapter consists of verses 7 to 15:³⁹

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.

I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

³⁸ The Authorized Version differs from Professor Delitzsch's interpretation of this passage. It reads, "Turn from him, that he may rest." Tr.

³⁹ Cf. Is. i. 11 ff.; the passage cited on p. 113 in the second lecture of *Babel and Bible*, Mi. vi. 6-8; and on page 100, Ps. li, 17; also xl. 6.

I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.

Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

But even to these deep and refined thoughts we find analogies in Babylonia (K. 7897Z 12-15):

"Offer prayers to God each day;

Words of purity are the worthiest burnt offering.

Towards thy God shouldst thou act with sincerity,

For that is the worthiest part of divinity."

* * *

It is not altogether easy to enter deeply into the Babylonian God-conception which was original with the Sumerians and was later adopted by the immigrant Semites as an integral part of Sumerian culture and was transmitted unchanged to a greater or less degree. And yet with the help of the cuneiform monuments we may conjure up the following picture.

Far down in the most southern portion of the Babylonian lowlands where the two rivers sought to reach the sea through thick jungles of tall rushes, the Sumerian nation rose in the gray dawn of time in a brave but hard struggle with floods, blistering sunbeams, and many another foe to the dwellings of men. They supported themselves by agriculture and the raising of cattle, and because the welfare of the individual depended on the regular and harmonious working together of many, they became the first pioneers of human culture and civilization.

But although the world was small in which man built, sowed and tended his flocks in the sweat of his face, still it was full of mysteries and overwhelming impressions vibrating under the manifest sway of invisible, unsearchable, super-human, that is, godlike powers. Between the boundless, unfathomed, never resting ocean and the flowing torrents of the twin rivers now bringing blessing and now destruction, there lay like an island a piece of land drenched with water, which rewarded marvelously the industry of the people with the costliest gifts of grain and palms and every variety of fruit in inexhaustible profusion. And above earth and sea stretched the wide unexplored expanse of heaven with its myriad wonders!

With exultant hearts men saw the sun's fiery ball come forth in ever changeless majesty from heaven's gate; but in the evening

when uncanny night sank down upon their dwellings and they observed the bright and countless host of stars and constellations upon the dark background of the sky, their eyes remained fixed with amazement upon each moving creature of light full of wonderful splendor, especially that glorious but mildly beaming star which accompanies the ball of the sun at its going and coming like a true and inseparable sister—Istar, the goddess who at evening time invites man to rest in the arms of love, and in the morning wakens him to the renewed struggles of life. They greeted the moon with ever new thankfulness as a fatherly friend and protector when at definitely appointed times he turned toward mankind now his sickle, and now his full and brilliant diadem, while the borders of his light garments fluttered over meadows and streams of water.

All this they observed,—and besides, the manifold destructive powers, the pestilence which creeps up in the dark and suddenly lays its victims low, and the sand storms which come rushing along from the desert with horrible and pitiless force, and even darken the face of heaven; all these filled mankind with dread of the divine. They sought and discovered godlike powers, effects and revelations everywhere. From the heights of the heavens down to the earth and beneath it as well, in fire, in stream, in waving fields of grain, in each human being they saw a divine force operating, and thought that in each a god dwelt.

*“Alles wies den eingeweihten Blicken,
Alles eines Gottes Spur.”*

[Everything but proved the hallowed presence,
Everything, the presence of some god.]

And as the ability to make tiles out of earth, and to put tiles and bricks together into houses, walls and towers, or the art of forcing pure gold into the service of men for all sorts of decorative purposes seemed godlike to them as gifts of the gods, so too in justice and righteousness they perceived creatures of divine origin. Not as if they worshiped the bricks as a kind of fetish (not even of the sun did they do that) but much rather did they see in the whole universe of nature and spirit, phenomena and effects of a God outside and far above the world whose empire extended beyond earthly things.

The Babylonians personified separate divine manifestations as did all ancient peoples not even entirely excepting the Hebrews, for I recall for instance the angel of the pestilence (2 Sam. xxiv, 15 ff.). Moreover, the imagination of the Hebrews exacted the strict requirement that Yahveh as an invisible God could not and should



BABYLONIAN KUDURRU SHOWING EMBLEMS OF THE GODS.

not be represented pictorially, but this again was abundantly offset in that Yahveh himself appeared even in bodily and visible form upon earth having intercourse with men as the "angel of Yahveh"—a personification of God to which there is no analogy either in Babylonia or Assyria. The Babylonians conferred upon their gods different degrees of rank according to their spheres of influence, their efficacy, or their mutual relationship, representing the now generative, and now productive, now primary and now secondary phenomena as masculine or feminine, and under the figure of parents and children. Since the oldest forms of written characters for the word "month" have taught us that it is not made from "day" and the number 30, but is a comparative form of "day" by which "month" is designated, so to speak, as a single day raised to a higher power, I begin to realize why the Babylonians considered the moon-god as the father of the sun-god. And while they thus ingeniously personified single manifestations of deity, and saw the good, beneficent powers maintaining victories on every side over



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EMBLEM OF MARDUK.



EMBLEM OF EA.

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the evil and destructive agencies, they created a pantheon of gods, goddesses, and lesser divinities (angels and demons) full of imagination and poetry, and at the same time provided a favorable soil for mythological images and tales such as those which have been familiar to us since the days of Greece.

The Babylonians, too, were acquainted with a chariot of the sun-god to which strong and never wearied mules were daily harnessed, and they had mythical creatures like fauns and satyrs. While at the first glance emblems of the gods like those represented on the kudurru here reproduced, or, to select two in particular, one which represents the god Marduk, and one which symbolizes Ea the god of the waters within and under the earth, might appear more like the denizens of hell; to him who searches farther and sees for instance the fish, the symbol of the water, united with the goat, this goat-fish becomes the symbolization of the merrily gushing and blithely bubbling spring—in other words, becomes simply poetry. And as the Babylonians were taught by constant observa-

tion of the sky to recognize the eternal laws of the gods in the courses of the stars and their constellations, so they thought to discover indications of the divine presence in every earthly thing, in great things and in small—and even in the very smallest as the flight of birds. Hence the Babylonians prove to be seekers after God, yes, the most inquiring spirits among them even gave themselves up entirely to the search after God.

Countless traces point to the fact that like the philosophers of Greece and Rome, the deeper thinkers of Babylonia divined the ideal unity of the godhead behind the multiplicity of their individual gods.⁴⁰ Yet I may not carry out the proofs of this to com-



A SCENE IN THE DESERT.

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pletion, at least not with the purpose of comparing the Babylonian God-conception with Semitic monotheism. In this particular Babel and Bible will always remain contrasts, although here again even in this contrast they prove to possess one parallel, the parallel of human imperfection, from which even the Semitic, even the Israelitish God-conception is not free.

* * *

Stern, motionless and dead, the monotonous desert stretched out as far as the eye can reach, and unspeakably monotonous was the life of the nomadic tribes. No seed time, nor harvest, and therefore, too, no appreciative joy in in the precious gifts of the

⁴⁰ Cf. Alfred Jeremias, *Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der babylonischen Religion*, Leipsic, 1904.

earth; in consequence, too, of the unsettled wandering no investigating research in the miracles of the starry heavens. An entire lifetime was but a struggle for pasture ground and watering places, and victory was only possible because of the close unity of the race and the strict discipline of their warriors under the incontestable judgment of one man in command. A Semitic-Babylonian proverb says, "Man is the shadow of God, the slave is the shadow of the man, but the king is like God."⁴¹ Because of this saying Naram-Sin, the son of Sargon I, calls himself "the god of Agade" and is represented with the horn-bedecked head-covering. For the same reason probably, names of the deity are often found affixed to the names of the Semitic kings, as for instance, Sargâni-šar-ali, Narâm-Sin, Bûr-Sin, Ur-Ninib, Bur-Sin, Išme-Dagan of Isin, Nûr-Adad, Rim-Sin; and Dungi of Ur sometimes follows this Semitic custom. We observe, too, that in the Code of Hammurabi the property of a god or of the palace is equally respected (Sec. VI, 8) and in the letter of the gushing Adam-šum-usur to the Assyrian king, we find the words: "The king's father, my Lord, was the image (*salam*) of the god Bel; the king, my Lord, is also Bel's image." Of no less interest is the confession of a devout Babylonian (IV R 60* V R 47, II, 29-32) "I taught my country to keep the name of God and to honor Istar's name I instructed my people; the sublimity of the king I made equal to God and I had my people learn the fear of the palace." It may be worth while to call attention to the interesting parallel that in the Amarna letters the king is called *šâr balâti*, "the breath of life" just as in Lam. IV, 20 Yahveh's anointed is called "the breath of our nostrils."⁴²

Whether and in how far the nature and life of the desert contributed to the Semitic God-conception is doubtful. At any rate, the Semitic nomads saw in El or God to whom they raised eyes, hands and heart as to their "goal,"⁴³ one single and united being that made heaven and earth and alone exercises judgment over all

⁴¹ In the Assyrian letter 80, 7-19, 22, Z. 30 ff. In distinction from the word *avêlu* meaning "slave" we have here, it seems to me, the really free man characterized by the plural *avêlê*.

⁴² רוח אֱלֹהֵינוּ

⁴³ In spite of all expressions of my critics to the contrary, it is certain that the fundamental meaning of the Semite word for "God," 'il, 'el, "aim" or "goal," is direction. Not only because the former use of the word 'el in Hebrew proves it, but even the Assyrian-Babylonian scholars testify to the fact as unmistakably as possible. See *Babel and Bible*, p. 60-61, and 148 ff. The traditional view to which the people have held so tenaciously and according to which 'el is thought to designate God as "the strong one," is without any trace of a linguistic support, and is at once wrecked upon the short *i* of the original particle 'il.

above and below ; that does not walk and act as men do, but remains unchangeable from generation to generation,—a truly exalted, serious and sublime God-conception which, however, after the manner of men immediately became confused. As the Sumerians split up the godhead into the single manifestations of divine power and wisdom, and in so doing forgot the fountain head of the One, so the Semites divided the one God of heaven and earth into different racial and national gods. They drew him down to the narrow limits of their paltry separate existence, full of jealousy and love of fighting, and made the God of the universe their own personal special god under a name of their own particular dialect, and made themselves the people and property of this personal god.

From this particularistic God-conception even the great prophets of Judah and Israel did not succeed in freeing themselves completely and permanently. As the Arabian is impervious to the truth that his Allah, the one omnipotent creator of heaven and earth of whom Mohammed taught him, is none other than Yahveh, the one omnipotent creator of heaven and earth whose worship Moses kept alive in his people, so the Israelites since the time of their earliest forefathers worshiped the one God under the name of Yahveh,⁴⁴ the Moabites under the name of Kammosh⁴⁵, and the Ammonites under the name of Melech (Milcom)⁴⁶, i. e., the judge, but each without exception recognized the national gods of the others as actually and positively existing. It is generally known that the Old Testament itself teaches this.

We are all familiar with the beautiful passage in the book of Ruth where Ruth's sister-in-law at Naomi's wish returned "unto her people and unto her gods" (Ruth i. 15), while Ruth says to

⁴⁴ My earlier claim (see *Babel and Bible*, page 150) that the Semitic nation which had penetrated into Babylon seventy-five centuries before Christ and from which Hammurabi sprang knew and worshiped the God *Ia've*, *Ia'û* (i. e., Yahveh, Yahu) has brilliantly triumphed over all criticism and doubt. Cf. Giesebrecht, *Friede für Babel und Bibel*, p. 3 ff.; 41-47; also Kamphausen who in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, 56, 488 remarks: "With praiseworthy discretion Zimmern points out (K A T 465-468) that the name Yahu or Yahveh appears in Babylonian language only as the name of a foreign God." Since it is well known that I myself have never made a different claim, another interpretation of these words would have been nearer the fact.

⁴⁵ The Assyrian rendering of the name of the national god of the Moabites by *Kammûsu* shows that the Hebrew KMVS^u is more correctly vocalized *Kamosh* than *Kemosh*; root form *Kammâs*.

⁴⁶ The designation of the highest god as Mälâch, "judge, king," is known to have been spread in Canaan far beyond the Ammonite boundary, whence the cuneiform List of the Gods (K. 2100 Col. IV, 12) says that "God" was called *malahum* in the western country. Observe here the same rendering of the vowel *ä* (*Sägol*) by the cuneiform *a*, as this Babylonian *Iäva* proves to be in so many of the names of the exile. It is an acknowledged fact that the Babylonian system of punctuation made no distinction between *a* and *ä*.

her mother-in-law "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God" (verse 16). So speaks the simple faith of the people, and so too the historians and prophets who repeatedly mention Moab as the nation of Kammosh (Num. xxi, 29; Jer. xlvi, 46) as Israel is Yahveh's people. And since we have not the slightest foundation for the suspicion that Kammosh was not worshiped as the one creator of heaven and earth as much as Yahveh or the "most high God" of Melchizedek (Gen. xiv. 18 ff.) or that the moral and religious life of the Moabites was below the level of Israel, so it is evident that the characterization of the national gods of the Moabites and Ammonites as an "abomination" (1 Kings xi, 7) was purely the outcome of political jealousy.

How indispensably a particular god as the head and representative of national unity seemed to the Semitic races, we have a glowing example in the Assyrians. When in the second half of the third millennium before Christ, the Semitic Babylonians who had pressed forward into the land which later was to be Assyria developed an independent national existence, they yielded themselves at once, without disparagement of the Babylonian pantheon which they brought with them to their especial primitive national god Asur (*Ašir, Ašur*). He, the "saving" and "holy" god, self-begotten, without even a consort, and not united with nature or any forces of nature but standing high above all, was thought of and worshiped as the first cause of all things, and as the father, lord and king of all the gods. As Yahveh is called "the God of gods" and "Lord of lords" (Ps. cxxxvi, 2-3) so was Asur exactly the same; and if in Israel the cry was heard "Who is like Yahveh among the gods?" so on the Tigris it resounded: "Who is like Asur among the gods?" But the princes over the Assyrians were "priests of Asur" chosen by Asur since time immemorial to serve him as priests.

Asur never ceased to be the only and most high national God of the Assyrians although it is probable that the ancient Babylonian pantheon influenced Asur's position among the other gods in many particulars. Although the ancient kings of Assyria preferred the titles "Bel's viceroy, Priest of Asur," thus rigidly distinguishing Asur from the Babylonian Bel, the lord of earth and of humanity, yet it was natural that Bel, the chief of the Babylonian gods, and Asur, of the Assyrian should gradually fuse into one idea. Indeed we find *E-kur*, the name of the temple of the Babylonian god Bel, the tutelary deity of Nippur, transferred to Asur's temple *Esara* and consequently Bel's son Ninib called the son of *Esara*. Since Asur from the beginning dispensed with any consort (otherwise

how easy it would have been to give him one by the name of Aširtu!) and finally was assigned a goddess only to suit the "system," it is easy to realize that Bel's consort *Bêlit ilâni* was permitted to be Asur's wife at the same time. With the interchangeableness of Asur and Bel it is interesting to compare the analogous case of Marduk and Bel, as it is strikingly brought out in the Marduk-litany,⁴⁷ "Thy city Nippur cast not aside;" and also in another passage,⁴⁸ where Bel the second god of the highest trinity is missing because he has just been identified with Marduk.⁴⁹

The chosen people! The egotistic appropriation of the Most High on the part of the single Semitic tribes necessarily led to the further acceptance that every nation was "chosen" by the God concerned to serve him exclusively,—an acceptance well adapted to fill the particular tribe with especial pride. It is a well-known fact with what self-satisfaction the Moslem looks down upon all the nations of the earth who were not predestined like himself by Allah to know and worship the true God. In the same way in the case of Asur's people we meet with the same idea of "election," although without the slightest admixture of contempt towards the other nations and their gods. Ashur is the city, the land of Asur; the Assyrians his people, and especially the priest-kings of Assyria considered themselves called of Asur from the beginning to fear him, and their race chosen to be Asur's priests and ministers forever. In the same way Israel is the chosen people of Yahveh, not of God in our present comprehensive sense any more than the Assyrians as the people of the Lord God Asur could advance the claim of passing for the chosen people of "God."

The national god made a contract with his people which in Israel was even strengthened by a special external symbol, the circumcision (Gen. xvii. 10-14). He hated those who hated his people, and blessed those who blessed his people. Therefore Israel's enemies were *eo ipso*, enemies of Yahveh (Ps. lxxxiii). "I (Yahveh) will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries" (Ex. xxiii. 22). And just as Yahveh went to battle before Israel's hosts or *Zebaoth*, against her enemies, so Asur starts out with the armies of his people to battle and to victory. Therefore

⁴⁷ IV R 18 No. 2+BE 13 420. See Weissbach's *Miscellen* No. XIII.

⁴⁸ Z 63-64 and 25-30.

⁴⁹ The treatise of Morris Jastrow, "The God Ašur" in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (XXIV, 1903, 282-311) suffers from the fundamental error that it confuses the adjective forms under consideration in the name Asur, viz., *ašir*, *ašur* from *ašûru*, "to be saving, prosperous" (whence too the Hebrew *asher* is derived) with the participle *âšir* from *ašûru*, "to have charge."

we often see on the Assyrian reliefs, the symbol of the god Asur in front of or above the royal commander, in the whirl of battle or in the triumphant return. This symbol represents a half figure of a bearded man in the center of a circle, the symbol of eternity, the whole borne upon wide spreading wings, similarly to the way Yahveh is represented as flying upon the wings of the wind (Ps. xviii. 10). And as Yahveh is poetically represented as armed with shield, buckler and spear (Ps. xxxv. 2-3) or as it is said of him in the seventh Psalm (verses 12-13): "If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death," (Cf. Ps. xxi, 12), so Asur too appears armed with the bow. If a battle is to be fought, he is seen drawing the death-dealing arrow from the string; if victory is won he lowers his bow. The Assyrian standards also show the archer Asur standing upon an ox (Cf. Ps. xviii. 10) or hovering above oxen as he draws the arrow against his enemies and the foes of his people.



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Although Yahveh himself was not symbolized by any image, but was thought to dwell in the sanctuary of the ark of the covenant, yet his invisible throne (in remarkable contradiction to the absolute prohibition of the decalogue against any likeness) was thought to be hovering over cherubim ("he sitteth between the cherubim," Ps. xcix. 1). The representation of these higher angelic figures the Hebrews must have adopted as they found them from other people with whom they came in contact. And the most probable theory is that they were representations similar to the winged oxen deities of Assyria. The Assyrian standards which show Asur standing on or hovering over oxen, favor this acceptance.

How deeply rooted the belief was among the Semites that every nation and every land had its special divinity who wished and was permitted to be worshiped according to the custom of his own country, the Old Testament likewise teaches in two memorable narratives. We read in the Second Book of Kings (xvii. 25-28) that as long as the people who were transplanted into Samaria from Babel,

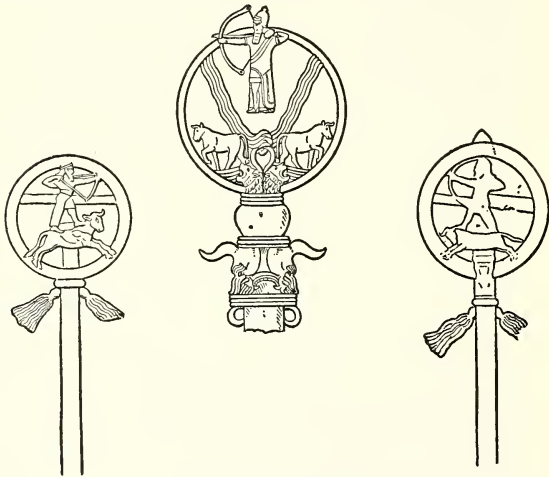


ASUR OVER ASURNAZIRPAL IN BATTLE. 4219
From a photograph by W. A. Mansell & Co. Original in the British Museum.



THE TRIUMPHAL RETURN OF ASURNAZIRPAL. (885-860 B. C.) 4220
From a photograph by W. A. Mansell & Co. Original in the British Museum

Kutha, Hamath, etc., "feared not the Lord" and "know not the manner of the God of the land," Yahveh sent lions among them until at the command of the Assyrian king one of the priests of Israel was brought back to Bethel and "taught them how they should fear the Lord." Sargon did the same thing according to the Sargon cylinder (74) with the captive tribes of many tongues who were located in his capital city; he had them taught by especially qualified Assyrians the "fear of God and the king."⁵⁰ And in the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Kings we are told that Naaman, captain of the Syrian hosts when he had been healed of



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his leprosy and turned to Yahveh, took with him "two mules' burden of earth" in order to worship Yahveh on Yahveh's own soil. Corresponding to this conviction, all the Semitic tribes immigrating into Babylonia accepted at once the intrinsically Sumerian religion of the land; Terach at an early day became "idolater" in Babylon, and even Yahveh-fearing parents in exile called their child after the name of a Babylonian deity, as for instance Mordecai, Esther's foster father, was consecrated by his father to the god Marduk.

In this way and in no other we can understand what would otherwise be incomprehensible; namely, why after they had pene-

⁵⁰ *mârê Assûr mûdût(e) i-ni kalâma ana sûhuzi sibitte-i palâh ili u šarri aklê šâirê uma'iršunûte.*

trated into Canaan, the Israelites both high and lowly took up almost from physical necessity the cult of their new Canaanite home, the worship of Baal and Ashera on the ancient sacred high places. And the pre-exilic prophets in spite of the titanic fight which they maintained for Yahveh against the Canaanite idolatry of their companions could not succeed in attaining any lasting results. It was truly a dramatic struggle which these inspired, austere, fearless men waged untiringly against kings and nation, urging their people to purity of life with the ardor of a holy passion, with rapturous eloquence and with every available means, by promises and threats, in order to keep Israel even on the ground of the captured land of Canaan, to the God of her fathers and forefathers, and to preserve the nation pure and unpolluted as a political and religious unity.

Parallels between Babel and Bible may also be found in religious ecstasy, or prophecy,—that condition in which personalities, highly endowed with spiritual gifts and ardently zealous for great political, ethical or religious ideals, feel themselves seized and impelled by God himself, and in such a frame of mind publish abroad visions, maxims, and speeches usually of a lofty, poetical tenor and winning eloquence. As there were many holy men in Israel and Judah who were conscious of the spirit of God working in them, and were therefore convinced that Yahveh himself spoke in them and through them (Amos iii. 8; vii. 14-15), so too in Babylonia and Assyria there were seers and prophets and prophetesses like Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 14) who were in particularly close communion with deity and made known the divine will to king and people.

In Assyria and Israel the prophets were sought to inquire of heaven whether or not the armies should start out to war (1 Kings xxii; 2 Kings iii). In both cases we hear at the beginning the encouraging "Fear not, I am with thee"; we read the declaration that God would go with them to battle and would destroy the enemy of his people with fire, and we gladly hear the words of the prophet ending "that ye may know I am Yahveh" (1 Kings xx, 13, 28) or Nebo, or Istar, as the case may be. Interesting cuneiform parallels may be found in many single passages in the Old Testament prophecies as well as the Psalms, as a result of the same modes of thought and speech in both Semitic nations. One of these seems especially worthy of note in this connection. In Zeph. iii, 13, we read of the absolutely happy condition of Israel in the last days, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they

shall feed and lie down and none shall make them afraid." This coupling of the practice of righteousness and truthfulness with quiet and peaceful pasturage is certainly peculiar, but it is to be found in just the same way in the cuneiform literature as the promise of an ideal and blessed existence. For instance, we read in destiny tablets, "If the sun and moon are seen together on the fourteenth day, the speech of the land will be truthful, truthful words will be in the mouths of the people, the cattle of Akkad will lay them down in security (*?pargâniš*) upon the fields.

But all the painstaking endeavors of the prophets were for the most part of no avail, and the catastrophes of the nation which seemed to the prophets to be the judgments of Yahveh broke upon them. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom became the spoil of the Assyrian dominions and fell to pieces in further exile, and even the inhabitants of the southern kingdom were uprooted from the Canaanite soil and transplanted in foreign lands. Still the holy zeal of the prophets of Yahveh continued to burn, they comforted their people with the promise that Yahveh would turn aside their captivity, would bring his people back and lead them to a glorious future if from this time forth they would cling undisturbed to the law of Moses and would serve no other god than Yahveh.

And the hope of the prophets did not remain unfulfilled. In 539 B. C. when without a stroke of the sword Cyrus entered the gates of Babylon which had been opened to him by treachery from within, and the people strewed his path with palm branches, he issued the command that to all cities whose gods had been carried away to Babylon, the gods should be returned and their former religion re-established, and to the exiled Judæans he gave permission to return in order that they might erect again at Jerusalem their ancient and venerable places of worship.

It is true that only a relatively small number of Judæans made use of the privilege granted them by the Persian monarch, but within those who did return to Palestine the joyful certainty came to be more and more confirmed that Yahveh had forgiven his people all their sins (Ps. lxxxv. 1-3) and himself had brought them back home to their own country, thus before all the nations of the earth acknowledging Israel to be his people.

We all know the continuation of the history of Israel. The temple rebuilt upon Zion under the most discouraging circumstances, under Antiochus IV fell a prey to the most extreme devastation. The conquests of the Maccabæan heroes over the Syrian army raised once more the jubilations of devout Judæans to the utmost: "Blessed

is the people whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Ps. xxxiii. 12). The proclamation of the glory of Yahveh was made known to all nations that his grace was great over Israel, that Israel was his, "his people and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. c. 3), heaven and earth shall glorify Yahveh as the one who has exalted Israel as the "people near unto him" (Ps. cxlviii). New songs continually celebrated the kingdom of Yahveh and his annointed among all the nations of the earth.

But the successes of the Maccabees brought about new defeats and renewed search for a habitation; the rule of Yahveh or the kingdom of God, and his Messiah with all the extravagant earthly expectations connected with it, would come, but although postponed to a promised future, continued to disappear into the far and ever farther distance.

* * *

A sower went forth to sow his seed,⁵¹ and with gentle forbearing, and loving hand, and with words so homely and withal powerful put aside the barriers which a particularistic national religion had erected betwen God and the world, and planted in the hearts of men a new conception of God and his relation to humanity—Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee who fulfilled the law and the prophets in that he interpreted both in an entirely new spirit, developed and perfected them. He made an end of all external legality and hypocrisy, elevated the laws of eating by the eternally valid word that not that which goeth into the mouth but that which cometh out of the mouth defileth the man; he met the misuse of the Sabbath with the bold remark that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; he laid the emphasis of human iniquity upon the heart and its desires; he did away with the confinement of worship to one particular place like Jerusalem, and for the pagan sacrifices and priestly ceremonial, substituted the secret prayer in the privacy of one's closet; he destroyed all hopes in a kingdom of God which would come in outward appearance but taught rather that it was already dawning among men; by the removal of all alleged prerogatives he opened to all men and to all nations alike the free and immediate access to their Heavenly Father; liberated the love of one's neighbor from the limitations which still clung to it and above all spiritualized the personal and human representation of God by the ever abiding words: "God is spirit, and those who worship him

⁵¹ With these same words J. Wellhausen begins the 24th Chapter entitled "The Gospel," of his *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte*, 5th ed. Berlin, 1904, p. 381.

must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24); "God is love, and who abideth in love abideth in God and God in him." Truly a new religion which, when all the manifold human superfluities that are foreign to the personality and life of Jesus are removed, is still destined to save the world.

"If such and such a star appear on such and such a day, then will a mighty king arise in the West land"—these and similar words we read repeatedly on Babylonian destiny tablets, and it is clear that such astrological lore is reflected in that story which is surrounded by an ever new fascination,—the story of the Wise Men of the East who had seen the star of the newborn king in the sky and came to worship the babe (Matt. ii). We rejoice in this story, for what Goethe⁵² says is true: "By no means do we know what we owe in general to Luther and the Reformation. We have been made free from the fetters of spiritual narrowness, and as a result of the continual growth of culture we have become qualified to return to the fountain head and comprehend Christianity in its purity. Once more we have the courage to stand with firm feet upon God's earth and to have a realization of our God-given human nature. Let spiritual culture continue to advance, let the natural sciences grow in ever greater extent and depth, and the human spirit expand as it will, it will never advance beyond the sublimity and moral elevation of Christianity as it glistens and gleams in the Gospels."

As certainly as this is the truth, when we search the ancient Babylonian world and see the leading spirits of Babylon endeavoring with earnest zeal, even with fear and trembling to seek God and the truth, we can joyously welcome the fact that the Evangelist granted to the Babylonian Wise Men to be the first to offer their homage at the cradle of the Christian faith.

⁵² Biedermann, *Goethes Gespräche*. Leipsic, 1890. Vol. VIII, 149. Conversations with Eckermann. March 11, 1832.