

ANCIENT BABYLONIAN  
MORAL AND POLITICAL PRECEPTS.

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TRANSLATED BY  
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THE tablet translated below is one of those found by the late Mr. George Smith in the débris of the North Palace at Kouyunjik. It is an Assyrian copy of an older Babylonian text which belonged to the period when Sippara, Nipur or Calneh, and Babylon were under one government, though Babylon, it would seem, so far from being the capital was only the third city of the kingdom. Certain indications in the language of the document make it probable that it was based on an Accadian original, but in its present form it belongs to the Semitic period of Babylonian history. Its contents remind us of the advice tendered to rulers by Egyptian and Chinese sages, and while

they bear witness to a strong sense of justice and obedience to law they plainly assert the responsibility of the king or magistrate, and his amenability to divine punishment.

Mr. Smith has given a rendering of the first twenty lines of the obverse in his *Assyrian Discoveries*, pp. 410, 411; the cuneiform text will be found in the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. IV., pl. 55.



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OBVERSE.

- 1 (If) the King avenges<sup>1</sup> not according to law, the people perish, his country is enfeebled.
- 2 (If) he avenges not according to the law of his country, the god HEA, the King of destinies,
- 3 his destiny changes<sup>2</sup> and by another replaces him.
- 4 (If) he avenges not according to (the wishes of) his princes, his days are long.
- 5 (If) he avenges not according to the statutes, his country knows invasion.
- 6 (If) he avenges according to the (law) book, the obedience of the land the King sees.
- 7 (If) he avenges according to the writing of the god HEA, the great gods
- 8 in stability and the praise of justice seat<sup>3</sup> him.
- 9 (If) he smites the son of the city of Sippara and gives (him to) another, the Sun-god, who judges heaven and earth,
- 10 another Judge in his country shall appoint, and a just Prince and a just Judge instead of unjust ones.

<sup>1</sup> The verb used here has the same root as the *goel* or "blood-avenger" of Job xix. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Or, "is hostile to."

<sup>3</sup> The Assyrian text has the singular instead of the plural here.

- 11 (If) the sons of the city of Nipur for judgment have  
thrown themselves (before) him, and he takes gifts and  
smites them,
- 12 the god BEL, the Lord of the world, a foreign enemy  
13 brings against him and destroys his army ;  
14 the Prince and his General in fetters in evil fashion are  
bound.
- 15 (If) the sons of Babylon bring silver and give bribes,<sup>1</sup>  
16 (if) the Judges of the Babylonians preside and to (their)  
entreaty turn,
- 17 MERODACH, the Lord of heaven and earth, his enemies  
over him shall place, and  
18 (his) goods (and) his treasure to his enemy gives.
- 19 (If) the son of Nipur, of Sippara, (or) of Babylon doeth  
this,  
20 into prison<sup>2</sup> he shall be caused to enter.
- 21 (If) the sanctuary of a god a place of uncleanness he  
makes (or) the city into a citadel heaps up,  
22 into the prison he shall be made to enter, a foreign  
enemy (the country) enters.
- 23 (If) Sippara, Nipur and Babylon (as) garrisons<sup>3</sup> thou  
proclaimest,  
24 their soldiers render obedience unto thee.
- 25 (If) an extortionate tribute the officers appoint unto  
them,  
26 MERODACH, the Prince of the gods, overthrows<sup>4</sup> the  
mighty Prince,  
27 his country to his enemy he transfers, and

<sup>1</sup> Literally, "cause treasure to enter."

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "house of watching."

<sup>3</sup> The Assyrian is *urbi*, identical with the *'erev* or "mercenaries" of Jeremiah xxv. 20, which is rendered "mingled people" by the A. V. According to Sennacherib, Hezekiah garrisoned Jerusalem with *urbi*.

<sup>4</sup> Or, "abhors."

- 28 the soldiers of his country obedience to his enemy yield.  
 29 Their soldiers ANU, BEL, (and) HEA, the great gods,  
 30 who inhabit heaven and earth, in their assembly deserters  
 from them make.  
 31 (If) the son(s) of Sippara, of Nipur, and of Babylon,  
 32 their children to war-horses offering,  
 33 (let) war-horses upon their children feed,  
 34 upon the watch the enemy descend,  
 35 their soldiers are slain, (their) armies and men are  
 slaughtered,  
 36 the god of famine (devours) his<sup>1</sup> soldiers for food,  
 37 the face of his soldiers he dismays, and with him he  
 goes.  
 38 (Though) the yokes of the oxen they unloose, and  
 39 the place (of their pasturage) they change,  
 40 at the waters where they rest . . . . he desolates  
 (them) ;  
 41 the watch (unawares the enemy) seize.  
 42 RIMMON, the minister of heaven and earth,  
 43 the creeping things of his field for want of food causes to  
 die, and  
 44 those that are slain the Sun-god burns up.  
 45 (If) army and General, the Chief Minister<sup>2</sup> of the King,  
 46 (their) full fealty *untruly* present,  
 47 by the command of HEA, King of the abyss,  
 48 army and General with (a curse) are cursed,  
 49 their fortress into the stream is tumbled ;  
 50 afterwards when the wind overthrows (their) deeds, when  
 to the deep it allots (them),  
 51 their bonds they break, and this table (of precepts)  
 52 again will cause them to go forth ; to (their) allegiance it  
 will (restore) them.

<sup>1</sup> That is, the king's.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "the appointment of the face of the king."

- 53 NEBO, the scribe of BIT-SAGGAL, the enclosure of the  
 hosts of heaven and earth in the *centre* of all things,  
 54 the founder of the sovereignty, the bonds of that country  
 breaks, and fealty establishes.  
 55 Whether (he be) Ruler or Priest or General,  
 56 whoever in Sippara, Nipur and Babylon as Temple  
 Guardian is appointed,  
 57 reverence for the temples of the great gods he shall lay  
 upon them.  
 58 (If) the great gods are angry and the deities desert their  
 sanctuaries,  
 59 he shall not enter into their shrines.
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- 60 (*Colophon.* Tablet beginning):—(If the King according  
 to) law avenges not, he dies.
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- 61 Palace of ASSUR-BANI-PAL, the King of multitudes, the  
 King of Assyria,  
 62 to whom NEBO and TASMIT gave broad ears,  
 63 (and his) seeing eyes regarded the engraved characters  
 of the tablets ;  
 64 this writing which none of the Kings that went before  
 me regarded,  
 65 the secrets of NEBO, the literature of the library as much  
 as is suitable,  
 66 on tablets I wrote, I engraved, I explained, and  
 67 for the inspection of my subjects in the midst of my  
 palace I placed.



# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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