

THE REVOLT IN HEAVEN.

TRANSLATED BY

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THIS curious narrative is found on a cuneiform tablet in the British Museum. The original text is published in Plate 42 of Delitzsch's work, *Assyrische Lesestücke*. I gave a translation of it in the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. IV., pp. 349-362.

This tablet describes the revolt of the gods or angels against their Creator. It seems to have been preceded by an account of the perfect harmony which existed in heaven previously. And here I would call

to mind a noble passage in Job, chap. xxxviii., which deserves particular attention, since it is not derived from the Mosaic narrative but from some independent source, namely, that when God laid the foundations of the world, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." By "the sons of God" in this passage are to be understood the angels. In the beginning, therefore, according to this sacred author, all was joy and harmony and loyalty to God. But this state of union and happiness was not to last. At some unknown time, but before the creation of man, some of the angels ceased to worship their Creator: thoughts of pride and ingratitude arose in their hearts, they revolted from God, and were by his just decree expelled from heaven. These were the angels of whom it is said in the Book of Jude that "they kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation."¹ The opinions of the Fathers and of other religious writers on this mysterious subject it were useless to examine, since they admit that nothing can be certainly known about it. The opinion that one third of the heavenly host revolted from their

¹ Jude 6.

Creator is founded on Rev. xii. 3, where it is said: "And there appeared a dragon in heaven, having seven heads and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth. And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels. And prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out—he was cast out into the earth and his angels were cast out with him."

The Revelation of St. John was written in the first century, but some of the imagery employed may have been far more ancient, and for that reason more impressive to the religious mind of the age.

The war between Michael and the dragon bears much resemblance to the combat of Bel and the dragon recounted on a Chaldean tablet.¹ And it is not unworthy of remark that the Chaldean dragon had seven heads, like that spoken of in the Revelation.²

At the creation harmony had prevailed in heaven. All the sons of God, says Job, shouted for joy. What

¹ See G. Smith, p. 100 of his *Chaldean Genesis*.

² See 2 R 19, col. ii. 14, and my *Assyrian Glossary*, No. 108.

caused the termination of this blissful state? We are not informed, and it would be in vain to conjecture. But the Babylonians have preserved to us a remarkable tradition, which is found in the tablet of p. 42, and has not, I believe, been hitherto understood. It is unlike anything in the Bible or in the sacred histories of other countries. While the host of heaven were assembled and were all engaged in singing hymns of praise to the Creator, suddenly some evil spirit gave the signal of revolt. The hymns ceased in one part of the assembly, which burst forth into loud curses and imprecations on their Creator. In his wrath he sounded a loud blast of the trumpet and drove them from his presence never to return.



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[The first four lines are broken. They related, no doubt, that a festival of praise and thanksgiving was being held in heaven, when this rebellion took place.]

- 5 THE Divine Being spoke three times, the commence-
ment of a psalm.
- 6 The god of holy songs, Lord of religion and worship
7 seated a thousand singers and musicians: and established
a choral band
8 who to his hymn were to respond in multitudes
-
- 9 With a loud cry of contempt they broke up his holy
song
10 spoiling, confusing, confounding, his hymn of praise.
11 The god of the bright crown¹ with a wish to summon his
adherents
12 sounded a trumpet blast which would wake the dead,
13 which to those rebel angels prohibited return,
14 he stopped their service, and sent them to the gods who
were his enemies.²
15 In their room he created mankind.³

¹ The Assyrian scribe annotates in the margin that the same god is meant throughout, under all these different epithets.

² They were in future to serve the powers of evil.

³ It will be observed that line 15 says that mankind were created to fill up the void in creation which the ungrateful rebellion of the angels had caused. A friend has supplied me with some striking evidence that the mediæval church also held that opinion, though it was never elevated to the rank of an authorised doctrine.

- 16 The first who received life, dwelt along with him.
17 May he give them strength, never to neglect his word,
18 following the serpent's voice, whom his hands had
made.
19 And may the god of divine speech¹ expel from his five
thousand² that wicked thousand
20 who in the midst of his heavenly song, had shouted evil
blasphemies!
21 The god ASHUR, who had seen the malice of those gods
who deserted their allegiance
22 to raise a rebellion, refused to go forth with them.

[The remainder of the tablet (9 or 10 lines more) is too much broken for translation.]

¹ See note 1. This is another epithet.

² The total number of the gods is, I believe, elsewhere given as five thousand.



END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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