

**BABEL AND BIBLE: A LECTURE
ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
ASSYRIOLOGICAL RESEARCH
FOR RELIGION**

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Babel and Bible: A Lecture on the Significance of Assyriological Research for Religion by
Friedrich Delitzsch

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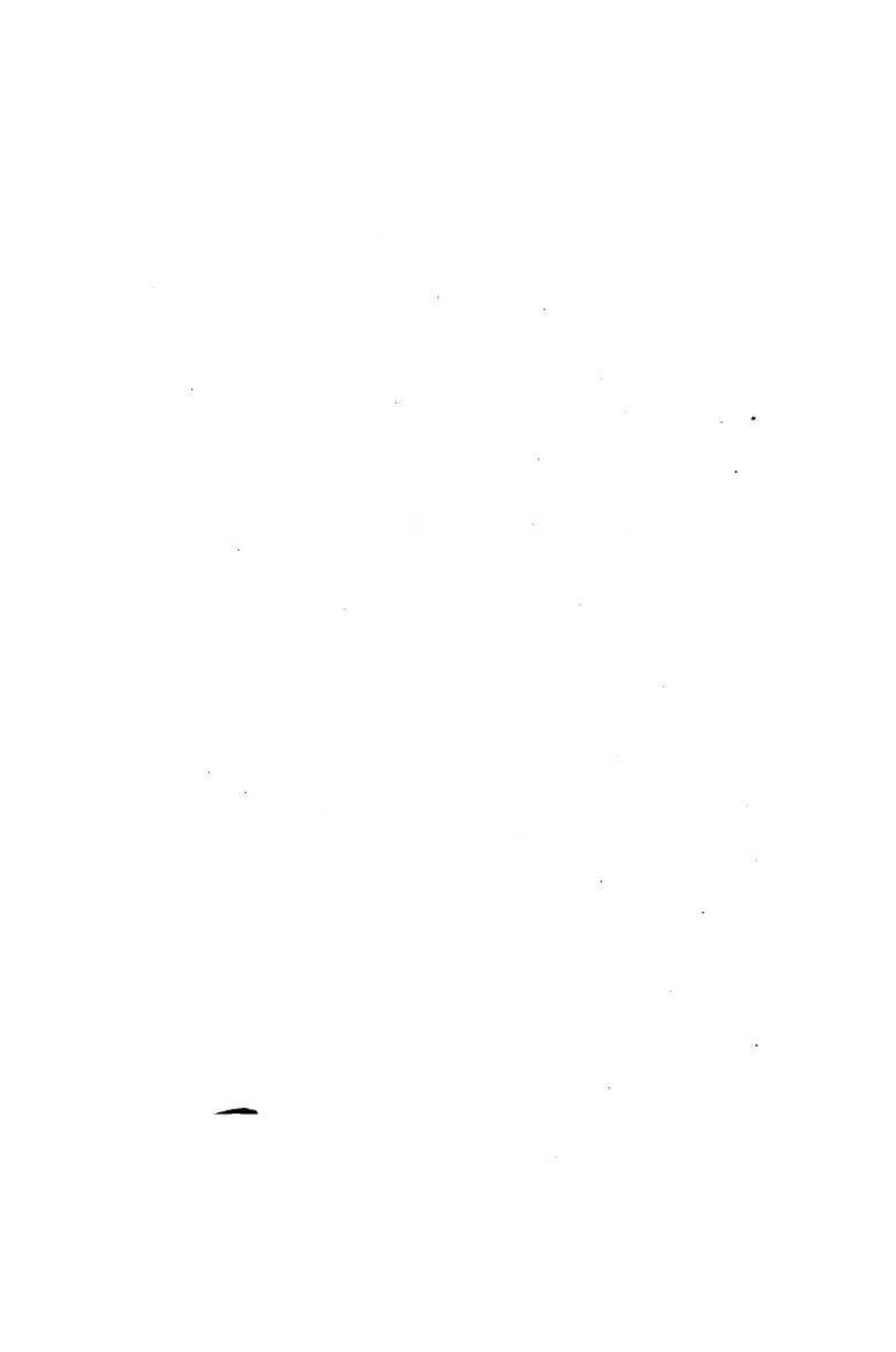
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A LECTURE ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
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FOR RELIGION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE GERMAN EMPEROR

BY

DR. FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH
PROFESSOR OF ASSYRIOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

THOMAS J. McCORMACK

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BABEL AND BIBLE.

TO what end this toil and trouble in distant, inhospitable, and danger-ridden lands? Why all this expense in ransacking to their utmost depths the rubbish heaps of forgotten centuries, where we know neither treasures of gold nor of silver exist? Why this zealous emulation on the part of the nations to secure the greatest possible number of mounds for excavation? And whence, too, that constantly increasing interest, that burning enthusiasm, born of generous sacrifice, now being bestowed on both sides of the Atlantic on the excavations of Babylonia and Assyria?

One answer echoes to all these questions,—one answer, which, if not absolutely adequate, is yet largely the reason and consummation of it all: *the Bible*. A magic halo, woven in earliest youth, encircles the names of Nineveh and Babylon, an irresistible fascination abides for us all in the stories of Belshazzar and the Wise Men of the East. The long-lasting dynasties here awakened to new life, however potent for history and civilisation they may have been, would not have aroused a tithe of their present interest, did they not number among them the names of Amraphel, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar, with whom we have been familiar from childhood.

And with the graven memories of youth is associated the deeper longing of maturity,—the longing, so characteristic of our age,—to possess a philosophy of the world and of life that will satisfy both the heart and the head. And this again leads us directly to the Bible, and notably to the Old Testament, with which historically our modern views are indissolubly connected.

The minute, exhaustive scrutiny to which untold numbers of Christian scholars in Germany, England, and America—the three Bible-lands, as we may justly call them—are submitting the Old Testament, that little library of books of most varied hue, is nothing less than astounding.

Of these silent intellectual labors the world has as yet taken but little notice. Yet this much is certain, that when the sum-total and ultimate upshot of the new knowledge shall have burst the barriers of the scholar's study and entered the broad path of life,—shall have entered our churches, schools, and homes,—the life of humanity will be more profoundly stirred and be made the recipient of more significant and enduring progress than it has by all the discoveries of modern physical and natural science put together. So far, at any rate, the conviction has steadily and universally established itself that the results of the Babylonian and Assyrian excavations are destined to inaugurate a new epoch, not only in our intellectual life, but especially in the criticism and comprehension of the Old Testament, and that from now till all futurity the names of *Babel* and *Bible* will remain inseparably linked together.

How times have changed! There was David and

there was Solomon, 1000 years before Christ; and Moses, 1400 years; and Abraham eight centuries prior. And of all these men we had the minutest information! It was so unique, so supernatural, that one credulously accepted along with it stories concerning the origin of the world and mankind. The very greatest minds stood, and some of them still stand to-day, under the puissant thrall of the mystery encompassing the First Book of Moses. But now that the pyramids have opened their depths and the Assyrian palaces their portals, the people of Israel, with its literature, appears as the youngest member only of a venerable and hoary group of nations.

The Old Testament formed a world by itself till far into the last century. It spoke of times to whose latest limits the age of classical antiquity barely reached, and of nations that have met either with none or with the most cursory allusion from the Greeks and the Romans. The Bible was the sole source of our knowledge of the history of Hither Asia prior to 550 B. C., and since its vision extended over all that immense quadrangle lying between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf and stretching from Mount Ararat to Ethiopia, it naturally teemed with enigmas that might otherwise have tarried till eternity for their solution. But now the walls that formed the impenetrable background to the scenes of the Old Testament have suddenly fallen, and a keen invigorating air and a flood of light from the Orient pervades and irradiates the hoary book,—animating and illuminating it the more as Hebrew antiquity is linked together from beginning to end with Babylonia and Assyria.

The American excavations at Nippur brought to

light the business records of a great wholesale house, Murashû & Sons, operating in that city in the reign of Artaxerxes (450 B. C.). We read in these records the names of many Jewish exiles that had remained in Babel, as Nathaniel, Haggai, and Benjamin, and we read also of a canal *Kabar* in connection with the city of Nippur, which is the original of the canal of *Kebar* rendered famous by Ezekiel's vision and situated "in the land of the Chaldæans" (Ezekiel i. 3). This "grand canal," for such the name means, may possibly exist to this very day.



Fig. 1. UR OF THE CHALDEES, THE HOME OF ABRAHAM AND THE FOREFATHERS OF ISRAEL.

(Ruins of el-Muqayyer, pronounced *Muqayyer*, English *Mugheir*.)

Since the Babylonian bricks usually bear a stamp containing along with other marks the name of the city in which the building of which it formed a part was erected, it was made possible for Sir Henry Rawlinson as early as the year 1849 to rediscover the much-sought-for city of *Ur of the Chaldees*, the home of Abraham and the

ancestors of the tribes of Israel (Genesis xi. 31 and xv. 7). The discovery was made in the gigantic mound of ruins of el-Muqajjar on the right bank of the lower Euphrates (see Fig. 1), which is now the storm-center of warring Arab tribes. The certainty of the discovery has been more and more established.

The data of the cuneiform literature shed light also on geographical matters: formerly the site of the city of



Fig. 2. HITTITE IDEOGRAPHIC WRITING FROM CARCHEMISH.¹



Fig. 3. KING HAMMURABI. THE KING AMRAPHEL OF THE BIBLE.

Carchemish, where Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B. C. won his great battle from Pharaoh-necho (Jeremiah xlv. 2) was sought for at random on the banks of the Euphrates, but in March, 1876, the English Assyriologist George Smith, starting from Aleppo and following the river downward from Biredshik, rode directly to the spot where from the

¹ Confirming the discovery of the site of Carchemish, where Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho in 605 B. C.