

The next in order of time—if not, indeed, developed as early as that of Egypt—is the religion of Babylon, or Chaldea. Under this, Nineveh, or the Assyrian Empire may be embraced. Regarding the latter, little, comparatively, is known of an accurate nature. The Bible is silent on its history, from the time that Asshur led forth the Babylonian colony to the banks of the Tigris, till the reign of Jeroboam, II. King of Israel; a period extending over more than 1200 years. The reputed history of that empire, by Herodotus, is also lost. The spade and the mattock are now the only means by which its annals may be dug from its ruins; and an indistinct little has, as yet, only been gathered from the exhumations, by Rich, M. Botta, and chiefly by the enterprising Layard. Yet, considering its derivation from, its presumed long dependance on, its proximity to, and its commercial and social interchange with Babylon; and from references to its idolatry, gleaned from the Bible, when it had attained great power, and become a formidable enemy to Israel and Judah, there is every reason for believing that, in characterising the religion of Babylon, that of Nineveh is embraced; and which, if not actually the same in all minute points, had still all the great lineaments of a faithful counterpart.

The religion of Babylon was the same in character as that of Egypt, for the same primitive ideas are transparent; only there are these differences, that there seem to have been few, if any, terrestrial objects worshipped, except images representing celestial divinities; that these were the same divinities, only with other names; and that the religious rites were celebrated, if it were possible, with greater grossness and impurities. There were at the head, and as the parent of the whole idolous progeny, the supreme god Bel, and the supreme goddess Mylitta; the one representing the sun, and the other the moon. To Bel, the Babylonians paid constant worship in gorgeous temples, and also in sacred enclosures, in which the image was erected; and before which, the sacred fire—the emblem of the sun—was constantly fed; and into which human beings were thrown, as propitiatory and honorary offerings. An instance of this is recorded by Daniel, when Nebuchadnezzar made an immense golden image of the supreme idol, and set it in the plain of Dura; and had the large sacred court* of fire burning before it, and commanded that all who would not fall down and worship, should be doomed as sacrifices to his

* The "burning fiery furnace" was in front of the idol, and was simply a court, open above, and walled round on the sides.