

HOW GOD TOOK SATAN'S BREATH AWAY

There once was a great dragon, red like blood. He was a terrible serpent, ancient beyond human memory. His power and cunning were beyond human reckoning, and he was evil beyond all depraved human imagination.

And the dragon was real. He did not inhabit the realms of fairy-tale or nightmare — their horrors were but his shadows cast in legends. No, the dragon inhabited the real world of men, though imperceptible to their eyes and ears — unless, of course, being perceived served his wicked purposes.

And the dragon abhorred man. He hated them out of his virulent, bitter hatred for the High King who had created man. For, you see, the dragon too was a creature, having been fashioned by the King in ages long past, though not as a dragon, but as a magnificent prince.

A Prince Endragoned

Once upon a time, this prince was numbered among the great ones; he was a god in the holy council of the High King over all gods. But deep in the labyrinthian channels of this prince's heart, pride began to run like a toxic sap, poisoning his loves and his thoughts. The greater he became in his own eyes, the more his true greatness diminished.

Self-deceived, the prince strove for greater glory than he possessed. He desired glory not bestowed by the King's grace, but glory all his own, self-achieved and self-ascribed. In the deeps of his heart, he exchanged the glory of the High King for a false image of himself he had come to love. And in doing so, he exchanged the truth for a lie and worshiped his creaturely self rather than the Creator King, making himself a rival of the King.

Therefore, the prince was cast down from his exalted place in the council of the great and hurled out of the King's presence. He fell like lightning to the earth. There the King gave the treacherous prince up to the wicked passions of his heart, and he, who was once numbered among the gods, became the most dreadful of dragons. A time was then fixed by the King for the dragon's final judgment.

A Vile Ambition

So, when this dragon saw that the High King had fashioned mankind in his image, that he made them gods as he had once been, and had given them to rule over the earth, he was enraged. He burned with bitter hatred and longed to shatter these images of the One he hated most.

Then a wicked plan took shape in his brilliant, futile mind, which pleased his darkened heart. If he could entice the man-gods to turn against the King as he had done, they too would share his terrible fate; they too would be cast from the King's presence; they too would become objects of the King's just and terrible wrath. And the Sovereign's sentence upon them would be irrevocable, just like the sentence upon him.

But even more desirable, the dragon would enjoy one great triumph: he would succeed in stealing the King's glory by defacing the King's image,

woven into the very flesh and bone of these feeble gods. And before his dreaded day of judgment, he would remake these fallen gods into lesser dragons — images of himself — which he would enslave to wreak wanton destruction in the world the King had made.

Let the High King destroy him with omnipotence! He would leave an unfading scar upon the Everlasting Father: the eternal perishing of the King's prized people. It could not fail to diminish the King's joy!

A Terrible Triumph

So, into the peopled garden crept the crafty, condemned serpent. He presented himself to the image-bearers as a bearer of enlightenment. He promised them the fruit of godly wisdom if they would but set aside the King's sole prohibition and simply think for themselves — for were they not also gods? Surely, possessing the King's wisdom and knowledge would increase their glory, for they would be even more like the High King than they yet were.

As they pondered the dragon's cunning lies, pride began to seep into the heart channels of the image-bearers. They believed the dragon's dark light. They simply thought for themselves — only to discover too late how great was this light's darkness. In horror, they soon realized the serpentine promise yielded foolishness, not wisdom; death, not life; alienation from the King, not greater likeness to the King. In rejecting the King's command, they had rejected the King's rule. They had become the King's enemies. Theirs was treason of the highest order. And for such a crime, against such a King, there was only one just sentence: destruction.

The dragon exulted as the deeply grieved King cast his broken images out of the blessed garden of his favor, into a world now cursed, one the dragon could now rule. He savored each sentence of judgment pronounced upon the fallen gods and relished the dragonling that must surely await them.

But as the High King issued his just decrees, the dragon heard an ominous promise: the great serpent's head would one day be crushed under a human foot. These words made him writhe in fury, and he resolved to keep a wary watch, that he might destroy the foot before the blow could fall.

But unknown to the dragon, mysterious decrees had been uttered by the High King in the secret counsel of his villages before the dragon existed, conceived in wisdom unimaginable to a dragonfly mind.

Enter the Dragon Slayer

Weary years passed as the cursed earth and its depraved inhabitants languished in bondage to corruption. And then, in the fullness of the King's time, the ancient, mysterious decrees began to unfold. In an unexpected place and an unexpected way, into the world stepped the Dragon Slayer.

Despite the dragon's vigilance, the Slayer appeared at first undetected. The snake had not foreseen such a mystifying entrance. When he awoke to his danger, he recognized in terror his long-expected foe was the very Son of the High King.

But what strangeness was this? The Mighty One, born in the likeness of feeble man? To what end? And as a defenseless child in the care of a peasant? Quickly he sought to devour him and his fearful foot. But the Slayer eluded the primeval assassin and waited for the appointed Day with an unnerving quietness.

The Slayer Is Slayed

Finally, the day drew near. But as it did, the dragon grew only more perplexed by his Adversary.

At times he displayed a dreadful power. The dragon expected this. Yet the Slayer proved the meekest and humblest of all mankind. And he gave himself no advantage. He made his home in a despised village in a reviled region. He sought no education, pursued no influential profession. He chose the weak and foolish as his followers — even a treacherous man as his close confidant. But the strong and wise he humiliated, and their envy and suspicion was infected with poisonous resentment. And thus, he was rejected by those wielding power, becoming a threat they wished to eliminate. Even when his survival depended upon the approval of the great crowds he drew with mighty miracles, he drove them away with hard words.

All this made the wily lizard wary. Such absurdity! This Slayer appeared more bent on being crushed than on crushing the serpent. Well, if such was the Slayer's wish, the serpent would grant it with relish.

Then all at once, the dark stars aligned: the lethal leaders, the traitorous confidant, the disillusioned people, the faithless friends, the immoral tetrarch, and the pragmatic prefect. All aligned against the Dragon Slayer and with terrible, brutal swiftness, the deadly dragon struck. And the great Son of the High King lay slain in the bloody bed that he had made.

The great red dragon exulted more than before. He had achieved far beyond his wildest hopes. Not only had he disfigured the image-bearers — he had slain the Dragon Slayer! It had been so easy, like a wolf upon a lamb. The crusher lay in defeated death, his foot sorely bruised. The serpent lived triumphantly, head unscathed and unbent. When he faced the High King's omnipotent wrath, he would do so with his prodigious pride intact.

The Dragon's Nightmare Morning

Then came the morning of the dragon's nightmare, the morning the Son of the High King arose from his bed of blood and stood, indestructible, unassailable, upon strong feet, scarred but without a bruise.

The great serpent looked upon the risen Slayer, bewildered. Then the terrible truth dawned upon the ancient liar with blinding brightness. He had not crushed the Crusher; he had slain the Lamb of God! He had not seen it! How had he not seen it? How had he not seen an altar of sacrifice in the Roman cross?

An altar! An altar is for the expiation of sins! Whose sins? Not the unblemished Son's, but the fallen gods of mankind! An altar is for the propitiation of wrath! Whose wrath? The High King's!

No! No! It could not be! Could it? Had the great Judge become guilty so man could be forgiven? Had the Holy become unholy that unholy man may become holy? And of course, the curse of death could not remain upon the sinless willingly sacrificed. What a fool he'd been! But who would have thought such a thing? Just wrath he knew. But such loving mercy he did not. And lavished upon such undeserved creatures!

The realization was excruciating. The Son of the High King had not come to bring upon his head the final blow . . . yet. The truth was far worse: the Son had come to destroy all that the dragon had worked for so long. And oh! he had indeed left an unfading scar upon the Everlasting Father, but not the scar he planned — man's destruction. It was the scar of man's redemption!

Waves of horror washed over him as he watched all his hopes collapse around him like a castle of cards in the wind. What he thought so wise proved foolish; what he thought so foolish was proved wise beyond comprehension. Whatever glory the dragon thought he had grasped in his terrible claws, the Son had just snatched away.

The human Son of the High King had indeed bruised his head, not with power, but with shame. The dragon's great foolishness was now on open display for the entire host of the High King to see. And every fallen human the King would redeem and restore through Son's sacrifice of unsurpassed love would be another blow of shame upon his wicked head — and another ray of the King's glory. Another surge of the King's joy.

This was the worst possible sentence upon a being of such diabolical pride: the dragon would die a billion deaths of shame before the Dragon Slayer finally destroyed him. And with the great wrath of unfathomable humiliation, the dragon loosed a terrible roar.