

This is the first of four hymns explicitly against Julian, composed after the apostate emperor's defeat and death. Having assured his church in the previous hymn that despite appearances, God has not abandoned his flock, Ephrem now extends his argument to encompass the new events and to offer a positive interpretation of the whole. There has been a cosmic alignment of forces, of all the good against all the evil. On the one side with God are the church and the angels; on the other are Satan and his demons, Julian, all the wild, repugnant and monstrous forces, the pagans with their idols, the heretics and the Jews. For Julian was not a true king, whose sceptre drives away the wild animals like a shepherd's crook (str. 1). Instead of protecting his flock, he had left them open to the ravages of the wild animals, that is, the Persians, his true allies (str. 2). The rejoicing of the wild beasts, the resuscitated idols, and Satan and his demons were short-lived, since they all fell with the emperor (str. 3-7). But first there had been a period of persecution, apostasy of those less firmly rooted, and suffering for the faithful (str. 8-11). The peaceful harmony of the reigns of Constantine and Constantius had allowed untried Christians to mingle unnoticed with the true (str. 12-13). Unwittingly, the forces of Error had glorified the true by exposing the hidden apostasy of faithless Christians (str. 14-15). The Jews, too, Ephrem claims, were exposed as idolaters, seeing in Julian's coinage the golden calf of Sinai, and following him as they had followed Jereboam (str. 16-19). Like Nebuchadnezzar, the apostate has been rebuked by God (str. 20).

HYMN 1

*Against Julian,
The King Who Apostatized*



Against The Heretics and The Jews

On the melody: Rely on the truth

- 1 The sceptre of kingship shepherds humankind,
cares for cities, drives away wild animals.²³
The opposite was the sceptre of the king who apostatized.
the wild animals saw it and exulted:²⁴
the wolves were his partisans; the leopard and the lion raged;
even the foxes raised their voices.
- 2 The wolves saw the clouds, rain and whirlwind.
Calling to one another, they attacked. Ravenous, they rampaged.
Utterly hemmed in, they were all furious.
They surrounded the blessed flock.
But the sceptre that had gladdened them was broken and moved
them to regret.
a crushed reed²⁵ was the support of the left hand.²⁶
- 3 They fled back into their caverns, dark and primeval.
The fear they had stripped off, they put on again in their dens.
The creation that had been gloomy, brightened and exulted,
but the rebels were trampled.
The heads of leviathan were smashed in the midst of the sea,²⁷
and his crawling tail was shattered in the midst of the dry land.
- 4 The living dead²⁸ awoke and were resuscitated.
Thinking themselves revived, they were rebuked—how they were
disgraced!

23. The *casus pendens* construction of the Syriac is difficult to translate into graceful English.

24. The Sassanid Persians are meant.

25. 2 Kgs. 18.21 (Isa. 36.6).

26. I.e., the forces of evil.

27. Ps. 74.13-14.

28. I.e., the pagans.

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- Being resuscitated, they revived graven images.²⁹
 The idols confuted the apostates.
 One is the death of pagans and tares,³⁰
 all of whom took refuge at once in the same one.
- 5 At that time, then, the mud seethed and spewed out
 vermin of all sizes and worms of every sort.
 They bred, and the earth was full of them in the middle of winter.³¹
 The breath of the dragon made the earth seethe,
 but the One equipped with the sandal of truth
 despised the poison of the stings of the sons of error.³²
- 6 Those who stood with the overthrown³³ fell with the fallen.³⁴
 They persevered, thinking even they could stand firm.
 The fools clung to one another, but as it transpired they all fell.
 Their fall attested their impediment:
 although divided, they agreed on the stumbling block.
 In the love of one king they were joined.³⁵
- 7 When demons rejoiced, they suddenly revived with them.
 When the Evil One was jubilant, they exulted with him.
 As if by a mystery, time arranged
 for all of them at once to be dependent on one.
 They made themselves brothers and members of one another,
 for they all depended on the head of the left hand.
- 8 For while the right hand was grieved over sinners,
 the children of the left hand rejoiced greatly.

29. On the importance Julian ascribed to the revival of pagan cult, and for a discussion of the date of its restoration, cf. Bowersock, *Julian*, 55–110 et passim, esp. 61, 70, 86f.

30. The tares are heretics. This agricultural imagery, rooted in the New Testament, esp. Matt. 13.24–30 et par., is common to early Christian literature, but received relatively little emphasis in Syriac Christian literature before Ephrem, who uses it frequently; cf. Nat. 3.15, CNis 20, 29, 31, 33, and Murray, *Symbols*, 195–99. For the more common Early Syriac theme of the vineyard, cf. *ibid.* 95–130.

31. Ephrem alludes to Julian's seizure of power in December 361. A traditional portrait of Julian as the hesitant and fortuitous heir to Roman power is presented by Browning, *Emperor*, 95–122. Bowersock portrays Julian's rise to power as more calculated, Bowersock, *Julian*, 46–65.

32. Although the identity of the champion of truth here is unclear, Christ probably is meant, and the contest portrayed is between Christ and Satan. It is also possible, however, that Ephrem alludes to the rumors that Julian had arranged for Constantius to be poisoned; cf. King, *Julian*, 27, n.1.

33. I.e., the idols.

34. Julian. The word may also mean "deserter," thus alluding to his apostasy as well as his death in battle.

35. The king is not only Julian but also Satan, as the following strophe shows.

HYMN 1

- In the season of the penitents, angels alone rejoice.
 Without realizing it, fools behave in the opposite way.
 Only the church agrees with the Watchers in both:
 she suffers over the sinners but rejoices over penitents.³⁶
- 9 The Evil One saw that he had intoxicated and confused people.
 He rejoiced and mocked freedom all the more
 that people have so thoroughly enslaved themselves to him.
 The Evil One was astounded how much he tore us to pieces,
 but the fools, torn to pieces, did not feel their pains.
 Although the Physician was near, they despised the cure.³⁷
- 10 The ugly, dark, all-gloomy winter³⁸
 robbed the beauty of the all-rejoicing spring.³⁹
 Thornbushes and tares were disgorge and sprang up.
 The dry frost moistened

36. Cf. Luke 15.10. In this strophe Ephrem uses the two words most commonly chosen by him to denote angels: *ml'k'* and *'yr'*, here translated "angels" and "watchers." The first has the root meaning of "messenger," is the most common designation of angels in the Bible, and carries the specific meaning characteristic of angels in the canonical scripture. "Watchers" is, on the other hand, the most common general designation of angels in Ephrem, especially in his earlier writings, and is characteristic of his angelology. Rooted in Iranian conceptions of Amesa Spenta and Mithra as heavenly beings who are constantly alert, never sleeping, this sort of angel appears in the extra-canonical I Enoch as well as in Syriac literature before Ephrem in the *Acts of Thomas* and in the writings of Aphrahat. The word *'yr'* occurs in the Book of Daniel, thus giving a kind of biblical pedigree to a notion fundamentally unlike the usual biblical angel. Ephrem is aware of the root meaning of the word and sometimes indulges in elaborate word play on it. Watchfulness is symbolic of holiness; its opposite, sleep, represents sin and death. So Christ is the "Watcher" par excellence, who makes it possible for faithful Christians to be "watchers" and ultimately to live the angelic life, i.e., eternal life. For him the human life most like the angelic life is the ascetic life, a proleptic participation in the paradisaic state. His angelology probably derives from the general cultural context rather than from a particular literary work. Cf. W. Cramer *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephrem der Syrer*, OCA 173 (Rome, 1965), esp. 68f., 165–81.

The watching angels are here portrayed in one of their characteristic roles as a chorus viewing the drama of human salvation, rejoicing with those who repent or who resist temptation; cf. *ibid.* 64, 148–52, and for the same in Aphrahat, *ibid.* 49.

37. The common metaphor of Christ as physician is particularly prominent in Syriac Christian literature from the *Acts of Thomas* onward, and it also figures significantly in the Manichaean literature; cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 199–203. Ephrem uses the image frequently in his Diatesseron commentary and develops it especially in CNis 34; *ibid.* 200f.

38. Literally, "the month of *šbt'*" (February–March). Ephrem may have in mind Julian's edict of 13 March 362, by which Christian clergy were no longer permitted to seek exemption from the decurionate; cf. Cod. Theod. XII.I.50; Bowersock, *Julian*, 73f. More probably, however, this is a broader allusion to the winter and spring of 361–62, which were marked by purges, reforms, new appointments and the gradual emergence of Julian's lack of tolerance for religious and philosophical views other than his own. For the sequence of events, cf. *ibid.* 66–85. For the suggestion that here *šbt'* may mean "winter" as *nysn* often means "spring," cf. Beck, *CSCO* 175, 66, n.9.

39. *nysn*.

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brambles in the inner rooms and thistles in the courts.
In this time the naked⁴⁰ and the barefoot⁴¹ shivered.

- 11 How the late seeding was afraid and terrified!⁴²
For without effort it was sown and took root.
Uprooted were the aftergrowth, the self-sown growth sprouting
throughout the world,⁴³
and that which had quickly risen to the surface,
but the seed of effort that struck root profusely—
its fruit came a hundredfold, sixty and thirtyfold.
- 12 The truth-loving kings⁴⁴ in the symbol of two bulls
yoked together equally the two Testaments.⁴⁵
With the yoke of harmony they worked and adorned the earth.
But the thorns clothed themselves in the beauty of the wheat,
and the seed spread its appearance even upon the tares.
Those who stripped away beauty did so in freedom.
- 13 Some of them were brambles, and some were wheat.
Some were gold, and some were dust.
The tyrant became a crucible for the beauty of the true ones.
Who has ever seen such a glorious sight?
For Truth entered and was tested in the crucible of the False One.
Unwittingly, Error has glorified the true ones.

40. *šyḅ* may mean "naked" or "apostle," hence, as Beck suggests, "bishop." Ephrem's pun is probably intentional since he uses the same double entendre in HdF 74.7-9; cf. Murray, Symbols, 80f.

41. Again, a pun is possible since "barefoot" is a designation for ascetics in the Pseudo-Ephremic writings on monasticism; cf. Beck, CSCO 175, 67, n.12; idem, Asketentum, 341-62.

42. Cf. Matt. 13.4-9, 18-23, et par.; weak Christians, possibly recent converts who have apostatized under persecution.

43. The Syriac is approximately equivalent to Greek *οικουμένη*, the inhabited world.

44. Constantine and Constantius: On Constantine as champion of orthodoxy against heresies due to his summoning of councils, cf. CH 22.20.10. Although he portrays Constantius as pious, pure and favored by God, cf. CJ 2.19, 2.25, 3.8, 3.10, 4.15, Ephrem passes over the question of orthodoxy with regard to this emperor. Given Constantius' well-known Arianism and Ephrem's polemics against that heresy, it is clear that the hymnodist consistently overlooks Constantius' heretical views of the sake of his contrast with Julian. Elsewhere, comparing him with Pilate, he exculpates him of responsibility for the Arian persecutions of the orthodox; cf. HdF 87.21, noted by Murray, Symbols, 66, n.2; discussed at greater length by Griffith, Ephraem, esp. 31-37. Similarly Gregory of Nazianzus in his invective against Julian makes only slight reference to these persecutions; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 4.37, and Murray, Symbols, 61f.

45. The precise meaning is unclear. Ephrem evidently intends to contrast orthodox Christianity with both Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament and Jewish rejection of the New Testament. It is remotely possible that he also intends a pun of Syriac *ṭwr*, "bull," and Hebrew *Torab*, the "Law."

HYMN 1

- 14 All who were apostates rejoiced in the apostate—
the sons of the left hand in the head of the left hand.
In him they could see who they themselves were,
since he became a mirror for all of them.
Those who rejoiced over his victory shared his lot,
inasmuch as disgrace befell them from his death.
- 15 For it was the church alone that opposed him utterly,
and they and he together opposed her utterly.
Without dispute this is sufficient to teach
that they were on one side and she on the other.
The furtive ones, who were believed not to belong to them,
hastily associated themselves with them.⁴⁶
- 16 The People raged and raved and blared the trumpet.
They rejoiced that he [was] a soothsayer and were jubilant that he
was a Chaldean.
The circumcised saw the image that suddenly was a bull.⁴⁷
On his coins they saw the shameful bull,
and they began to keep its feast with cymbals and trumpets,
for they recognized in that bull their ancient calf.
- 17 The bull of paganism engraved on his heart
[Julian] imprinted on that image for the People who love it.⁴⁸
Perhaps the Jews cried out to that bull,
"Behold the gods who will lead
your captives up from Babylon into the land they devastated,

46. The Syriac is more vivid: "they strung themselves with them [like beads] on a chain." The partisans of Julian here seem to be lukewarm Christians or even secret pagans, who like the emperor himself, disguised their beliefs until the death of Constantius. Possibly, however, he alludes to Jewish supporters of Julian, as in the following strophe.

47. As the following line indicates, Ephrem refers to the image on Julian's bronze bull coinage. Its iconography has been variously explained as: 1) the Egyptian god Apis (Eckhel, Babelon, Stein, Mattingly, Elmer), 2) a rhetorical symbol of the good emperor (Kent), 3) a Mithraic bull (Thieler), 4) the zodiacal symbol Taurus, allegedly Julian's birth sign, thus a representation of Julian himself (Gilliard); for discussion and bibliography, cf. F.D. Gilliard, "Notes on the Coinage of Julian the Apostate," JRS 54 (1964), 135-41, esp. 138-41. Bowersock argues that Ephrem's construal of the bull as the golden calf shows either that virtually no one understood the iconography (cf. Julian, 104), or that Julian issued the coins on an occasion having to do with his relations with the Jews (cf. *Numen* 28 [1981], 88-93, esp. 91). But Ephrem's association of the bull with the golden calf may be simply an idiosyncratic juxtaposition for the sake of his invective, meant especially to discredit the Jews by association with this *locus classicus* of idolatry.

48. Or "who love [Julian]" or "whom [Julian] loves."

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as the molten calf led you out of Egypt!⁴⁹
18 A king, the Babylonian king, suddenly became a wild ass,⁵⁰
but he learned to be subjugated; he who used to kick, kicked no
more.

A king, the Hellenic king,⁵¹ suddenly became a bull
and gored the churches, but he was dragged away.
The circumcised saw the bull imprinted on the staters,
and they rejoiced that the calves of Jereboam were revived.⁵²
19 Perhaps because of that silver coin on which the bull was portrayed,
the Jews were overjoyed that [Julian] carried it in his heart
and also in his purse and in his hand
as a type of that calf of the wilderness
that was before his eye and heart and mind;
and probably in his dreams he used to see the calf.

20 A king, the Babylonian king, went mad and went out into the
countryside.

He was made to wander in order to be gathered in; he was
maddened in order to come to his senses.⁵³

He made God rejoice and made Daniel exult.

A king, the Hellenic king, has been rebuked,
for he angered God and denied Daniel,⁵⁴
and there near Babylon he was judged and condemned.⁵⁵

49. Exod. 32.8.

50. Although the reference is clearly to Nebuchadnezzar, as Beck suggests, cf. Dan. 4.28-33, it is odd that Ephrem refers to him as a "wild ass," (*'rd'*) where the Peshitta uses "bull" or "wild ox," *'wr'*, the same word he used for the image on the coinage and in the next lines for Julian, "the Hellenic king."

51. In referring to Julian as "the Hellenic king" (*mlk ywn*) Ephrem emphasizes his "Hellenism," i.e., his pagan beliefs. If he meant to refer simply to Julian as Roman Emperor, the metrically equivalent *mlk rwm'*, would be more normal parlance since Syriac writers continued to refer thus to the emperors well into the Byzantine period.

52. Jereboam instituted a rival to the Jerusalem cult by setting up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and telling the people this was the god who brought them up out of Egypt, as in str. 17 above; cf. 1 Kings 11.26-15.34, esp. 12.26-32.

53. Cf. Dan. 4.31-37.

54. By attempting to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, Julian denied the testimony of Daniel 9.24-27, which Ephrem and many other Patristic writers understood to prophesy the permanent destruction of the Temple, cf. CJ 4.20.

55. Julian's death on the Persian campaign is the divine punishment for his apostasy; further, cf. CJ 3.1-9, 13-17.

Here Ephrem alludes to the tenth chapter of John's gospel which portrays the good shepherd whose sheep know him and who lays down his life to protect them from the wolf. Like Jesus, Constantius was a true shepherd, but Julian is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Characterizing the Jews as goat kids, he enlarges on the theme introduced at the end of the previous hymn, Jewish acceptance of Julian's leadership (str. 1). He implies that the emperor was a false messiah for them since he played the roles of prophet, king and priest (str. 2). Alluding to the attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, he claims that the emperor's "pledge" swayed them to continue to accept him after he shed his "sheep's clothing" by declaring his polytheistic beliefs (str. 1, 3.4). This shows, he argues, that the Jewish rejection of Jesus had been motivated by a hidden yearning for polytheism (str. 3).

Ephrem then returns to the larger theme of the divine purpose in these events. God has made Julian a mirror in which to see the falsity of pagan religion and the destruction that awaits those who put their trust in its oracles (str. 4-15). He claims that, despite the personal asceticism of the emperor, his religion is characterized by lascivious revelry, resembling the Israelite worship of the golden calf (str. 4-7). Just as the golden calf was destined for destruction, Julian, like an unwitting goat kid, was prepared for sacrifice by the falsity of his pagan oracles (str. 8-15). Nisibis is also a mirror displaying a contrapuntal lesson: As long as the people placed their trust in God and were faithful to him, they were preserved from Persian capture; only when they succumbed to idolatry was the city lost to the Persian forces (str. 16-27). Ephrem describes the dramatic and successful earlier defenses of Nisibis, associating their success with the piety of Constantius as well as of the city's inhabitants (str. 19-20, 25). The city was taken only when the inhabitants restored an idolatrous cult, and when they were led by an emperor who entrusted his plans to soothsayers, who nevertheless proved vulnerable even to the mundane deceit of traitors (str. 12, 15, 17, 18, 25). Even Shapur grasped the lesson God intended all to see in the fate of Nisibis, for he showed