



Isaiah 34:13-14

(13) And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. (14) The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.

King James Version

Lilith, a demon goddess of the night and the alleged first wife of Adam, found her way into Jewish folklore from the ancient Babylonians. Lilith and her companion, Samael (a [Satan](#) figure), are prominent characters in Jewish mythology but not in the Bible. However, some scholars believe that [Isaiah 34:13-14](#) refers to this night demon and supports her legend.

In the New King James Version, the Hebrew word underlying "the night creature" is *lilith*, which derives from the root *laylah*, meaning "night." [Isaiah 34:14](#) is the only place *lilith* occurs in Scripture, so its meaning is somewhat obscure aside from the implication of nocturnality. *Strong's Concordance* suggests it means "screech owl," and based on the context of wild animals in abandoned places, this definition would be a natural fit.

The Bible uses *lilith* as a common word. Nothing ties it to the Babylonian myth of Lilith, not even a suggestion that *lilith* is an individual's name. Even so, the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) capitalizes *Lilith*, turning the word into a personality. Apparently influenced by the Jewish legend of Lilith, the NRSV translators believed that Isaiah included a demon goddess in this prophecy of Edom's desolation. Since the prophet and his audience would have been aware of the Lilith myth, [Isaiah 34:14](#) must refer to the infamous night demon, they allege.

This reasoning is flimsy, to say the least. The translators assume Isaiah refers to a personality simply because a similarly named character appears in contemporary folklore. A modern parallel demonstrates how absurd this reasoning is. In a sermon, John Ritenbaugh off-handedly referred to Esau as a "joker." Was he saying that Esau is an incarnation of one of Batman's enemies, the Joker, in today's comic mythology? Of course not. The creators of Batman used the word "joker" as a name for an invented personality, but it has no connection to the subject of John's sermon.

Likewise, the Hebrew word *lilith* looks like the Babylonian word *lilitu*, its word for "night monsters." Because of the similar spellings, some scholars perceive an overlap and insert a demon goddess into Isaiah's prophecy, despite the Bible containing nothing else to support it.

Isaiah 34 prophesies of God's judgment on [Edom](#). Much of the chapter deals with the future desolation of the land of Edom, which will be fulfilled around the time of Christ's return. At that point, the angel from heaven will bind Satan and his demons in the bottomless pit ([Revelation 20:1-3](#)). Edom's territory will be empty, except for the wild animals Isaiah names. The wilderness will not be a haunt for a demon named Lilith because [Christ](#) will have restrained all the demons. Verse 14 is about a nocturnal animal, not a night monster.

Notice that when we constrain ourselves to what the Bible says, one unambiguous interpretation or picture arises. But if we start looking to myths or folklore to fill perceived gaps, something very different emerges. If we allow them, such fables will attach to Scripture like parasites and twist the meaning of God's Word.

Because of such deviations, Paul warns of false doctrine and heeding fables ([1 Timothy 1:3-4](#)). He counsels Timothy, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the [faith](#), giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons But reject profane and old wives' fables . . ." ([1 Timothy 4:1](#), 7). A few verses later, he admonishes him to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" ([1 Timothy 4:13](#), 16), instructing him to "[avoid] the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called

knowledge" ([I Timothy 6:20](#)). In his second epistle to his protégé, he warns against those who "will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" ([II Timothy 4:4](#)). The apostle similarly exhorts Titus about "not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth" ([Titus 1:14](#)).

The myth of Lilith eminently qualifies as a Jewish fable, profane and idle babbling, and a contradiction.

— David C. Grabbe

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