

Babylonian captivity – nebuchadrezzar ii



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The name Nebuchadrezzar, meaning " May the god Nabu protect the boundary," is significant of the work of this energetic Babylonian ruler. Babylonia had been the tramping-ground of the nations. Babylon (" gate of God") was the Mesopotamian capital from the time of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B. C. e.) through the Neo-Babylonian period. encompassing 2, 100 acres, Babylon's fortifications included a double gateway, known as the Ishtar (one of the principal deities of Babylon) gate, and also many temples. For centuries foreigners had ruled in the land and had warred with the Assyrians for its possession. In the last Kassite years the elamites had renewed their inroads from the east, penetrating to the very heart of the land. When Nebuchadrezzar II stood at the borders of egypt and a messenger advised him of his father's death in far-away Babylonia, a crisis had come in the history of a new empire. But for that death Nebuchadrezzar would almost certainly have added egypt to his laurels, and that were a thrilling possibility. But a danger fully as stirring lay also before him. If he had failed to reach Babylonia before the discordant elements in the new world empire were able to gather unity and force, all that his father had built might readily be destroyed. The day cried for a man of decision and of quick movement. Nebuchadrezzar II reached Babylon from the borders of egypt in season to prevent any outbreak in favor of a usurper, if any such were intended. He was received as king of Babylon without a sign of any trouble. So began one of the longest and most brilliant reigns (604-562 B. C.) of human history. (Cornfeld, 1982) Nebuchadrezzar II has not left the world without written witnesses of his great deeds. In his inscriptions, however, he follows the common Babylonian custom of omitting all reference to wars, sieges, campaigns, and battles. Only in a very few instances is there a single

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reference to any of these. The great burden of all the inscriptions is building. In Babylon was centered his chief pride, and of temples and palaces, and not of battles and sieges, were his boasts. As we are therefore deprived of first-hand information from Babylonian or Chaldean sources, we are forced to turn elsewhere for information of the achievements of Nebuchadrezzar II as an organizer of armies and a planner and conductor of campaigns. The knowledge thus obtained from other peoples is fragmentary, because each writer was more concerned about his own people than about the Chaldeans. (Shanks, 1992) The best help of this kind is obtained from the Hebrews, with whom Nebuchadrezzar had the first difficulties of his reign, and against whom his first operations were directed. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had paid his tribute regularly for three years after Nebuchadrezzar II left Palestine on his hasty journey to Babylon to assume the throne. (Ackroyd, 1968) He was, however, harassed by a patriotic party determined to compel him to throw off the Chaldean yoke. The only clear voice raised against such stupendous folly was that of Jeremiah, who, like Isaiah in a similar crisis, warned the nation against its suicidal folly. But the more Jeremiah denounced the greater his unpopularity and the more certain the triumph of the popular party. At last Jehoiakim omitted the payment of the tribute, and the issue was fairly joined. Nebuchadrezzar II did not invade the land at once, either because he held the rebellion in contempt and supposed it would be easily overcome, or because he was still too greatly absorbed in duties at home. His first move was to encourage Judah's neighbors to ravage the country in connection with Chaldean guerrilla bands. The Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites were very willing to join in such attacks on their old enemy. This haphazard warfare, however, came to nothing, and Nebuchadrezzar was

compelled to more strenuous measures. (Cornfeld, 1982) In 597 he dispatched an army to besiege Jerusalem, and soon after its appearance before the walls he arrived to take charge of it in person. With such forces as he could muster there could be no doubt of the ultimate issue, but Jehoiakim was spared the sight of his country's ruin, by a sudden death. (Ackroyd, 1968) His successor, a lad of eighteen years of age, Jehoiachin, known also as Jeconiah, inherited only trouble, and saw himself hemmed in by a force which must soon carry the city by storming or by starvation. Jehoiachin, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, and perhaps relying somewhat on the mercy of his conqueror, decided to surrender before an active assault should be undertaken. He was compelled to appear at Nebuchadrezzar's headquarters, with his mother and his entire court, to be carried into captivity. Besides this Nebuchadrezzar II demanded the surrender of seven thousand men capable of bearing arms, and one thousand workers in iron. These with their families were carried away to Babylonia, where they were settled in one great block by the river Chebar, a canal near Nippur. In the place of Jehoiachin, Mattaniah, another son of Josiah, was made king, under the name of Zedekiah. He was but twenty-one years of age, and was probably considered by Nebuchadrezzar II a man who could safely be trusted to rule over the remnant of the people who were suffered to remain when the better part of the inhabitants had been carried away. (Rohl, 1992) The choice was unfortunate, viewed from any point. (Cornfeld, 1982) Zedekiah was morally incapable of faithfulness to the Babylonians, and that, if for nothing else, because he was too weak to resist popular clamor and a mad patriotism. He was not wise enough to make himself and his state leaders in the counsels of the Syroph? nician states, nor strong enough to make any

concert that might be reached a power in troublous times. The policy he embraced was alike fatal to all who joined in it. It was, however, apparently not of his own devising. He fell a prey to other schemers bent on their own purposes. The real wellspring of the movements now to be described is to be found in egypt. (Kitchen, 1986)...