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## Mowing Lawns in Babylon: Madness of Nebuchadnezzar and Divine Sovereignty

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## **Introduction**

The world has gone mad! In recent years and months, world leaders have been cast from their thrones only to be replaced by those who are even more radical in their beliefs and behavior; terrorist regimes are surging, systematically moving through countries and slaughtering the righteous; and extremists are rampaging through the streets, oppressing the innocent and murdering the helpless. The world has gone mad!

The nations rage and the kings of the earth take counsel together against the LORD, but “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision” (Ps 2:4). Scripture reiterates over and over that God reigns in majesty and rules as sovereign over the heavens and the earth. The pitiful attempts of humanity to rebel against its Creator and to remove the constraints of his authority are futile; and God scoffs at their repeated endeavors to challenge his rule.

Yet temptation exists for believers to worry, to doubt, or to forget altogether that they serve a sovereign God who reigns with supreme authority and has allowed all events to transpire within his all-wise plan for the ages. The righteous stand reminded that our God has not lost control even while they live in a world that has. This reminder is seldom stated more clearly than in the words of the pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar. The mad king himself prompts us to exalt the King of heaven and reasons with those who listen, “for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan 4:37).

The biblical narrative of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, his pride, his madness and his restoration (all of which are included within God’s sovereign plan) serve as reminders to today’s student of God’s word. The sovereignty of God necessitates trust and obedience from those who have humbled themselves before the King of heaven.

This study will examine the years of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness and the interplay between the king’s pride and the sovereignty of God. We will make an approach toward that period chronologically

and canonically beginning with events that led up to Nebuchadnezzar’s rise to the throne and the events that surrounded Nebuchadnezzar’s first direct encounter with the God of Judah in Daniel 2. Each section of this examination will give consideration to Nebuchadnezzar and divine sovereignty in the context surrounding each successive chapter with attention given to the historical context, the exhibition of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride, the manifestation of God’s sovereignty to the king, and finally, the counter response of the Babylonian monarch. The objective of this approach is to give the student of God’s word and history a better understanding of the relationship this king had with the sovereign God, a better understanding of the history and content of Scripture, and a better understanding of the futility of our own pride in light of God’s sovereignty, so that we might better respond with humble obedience that springs out of faith in the Almighty.

### A. Nebuchadnezzar and Divine Sovereignty in Daniel 2

#### 1. The Historical Context

When Habakkuk observed the iniquity and violence of his day he cried out, “The law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted” (Hab 1:4).<sup>2</sup> The LORD’s response to the prophet was, “Wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans” (Hab 1:5-6). The rising, terrible power of Neo-Babylonia would serve as God’s instrument of justice toward the wicked kingdom of Assyria and the wayward nation of Judah. This ancient kingdom also serves to remind a contemporary audience that God, who is blessed forever and ever, “changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding” (Dan 2:21). And he is worthy of our thanks and praise.

The rise of Babylonian domination began in 626 BC with the accession of Nabopolassar, who threw off the yolk of his Assyrian masters. With the help of his northern allies, the Medes, he then

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<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk likely prophesied in Judah during the reign of Josiah and his sons, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. His oracle was probably written between 640 and 605 BC, in the years just before the first siege of Jerusalem.

sacked Nineveh fourteen years later and dealt the final death blow to Assyria's remaining army at the Battle of Harran in 609 BC, establishing Babylonia as the dominate empire for the next seventy years.<sup>3</sup>

His eldest son, Nebuchadnezzar, first appeared in the Babylonian chronicles in 607 BC as the crown prince and a commander in his father's army.<sup>4</sup> According to tradition, his marriage to Amytis had sealed the Babylonian-Median alliance five years earlier in association with the fall of Nineveh.<sup>5</sup> In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar humiliated Pharaoh's army at the Battle of Carchemish. Then in the same month he established his sovereignty in Jerusalem over king Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1; Dan 1:1-2), he sent a few captive youths to Babylon to be trained in the palace (Dan 1:3-7), and he ascended to the throne upon the death of his father, Nabopolassar.

## **2. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride**

The book of Jeremiah is filled with references to the servants of the LORD. Five times God reminded the people that his prophets whom he had sent to them were his servants (Jer 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4). One need not be surprised to hear of God's servant Jacob (Jer 30:10; 46:27, 28) or of "David my servant" (Jer 33:21-26). However, just as many times, God refers to "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant" (25:9; 27:6; 43:10).

God raised up this servant to accomplish his purposes at a particular point in history. However, believers are often left confounded when they consider God's sovereign choices and the manner in which he accomplishes his purposes. The astonished prophet, Habakkuk, responded to the LORD's plan, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" (Hab 1:13).

Ancient historical writings from Babylon shed light on the true character of Nebuchadnezzar whom Daniel, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and

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<sup>3</sup> James B. Pritchard, *ANET*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 304-5.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster, Writings from the Ancient World, vol. 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 226.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 221.

the other prophets would have known well. This servant of YHWH was a pagan worshipper of Babylonian deities who was devoted to the increase of his new empire and the building of great monuments to his gods.

His chronicles record that during the years in which the Judean youths were training in Nebuchadnezzar's palace, the king himself was well-occupied mustering his troops and marching into the Levant as a routine program to collect tribute and assert dominion.<sup>6</sup> Even after the interpretation of his dream and after the promotion of the Judean youths, Nebuchadnezzar continued this practice. In his third year (602 BC) he collected much spoil which he brought back to Babylon. These procedures shrouded the kingdom of Judah with servitude which was demanded from its leader, Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1).

In practice, during the first few years of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar merely continued the same policies of his father and the Assyrian kings before them. His early military endeavors followed the same pattern set in the final decades of the seventh century BC. Even his preferred methods of execution and punishment (quartering and domestic destruction that are recorded in Daniel 2) mimicked Assyrian methods.

In addition, his early inscriptions testified to his pious devotion to the deities of Babylon, particularly Marduk, and he understood his rule to have emanated from the sovereignty of these gods. For example, he inscribed the following in connection with his early refortification of the walls of Babylon, "Oh Marduk, lord of the gods, my divine creator, before thee may my deeds be pious, may they last unto eternity.... Truly thou art my deliverer and my help, oh Marduk. By thy faithful word that changes not verily my weapons advance, verily they are dreadful, may they crush the arms of the foe."<sup>7</sup> Other early inscriptions include the following:

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<sup>6</sup> Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 229.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire; Part I: Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar*, ed. Ernest Leroux (Paris: 1905), 75. Langdon considered this inscription associated with the building of the great eastern wall to be one of Nebuchadnezzar's first and places it in the early years of his reign after the death of Nabopolassar (8). The strengthening of the defenses was, in fact, a continuation of one of his father's great building projects.

Oh Marduk, lord, look with favor upon the work of my hands<sup>8</sup>

When Marduk, my great lord, had exalted me to the lordship of the land and for caring for the city and rebuilding its sacred places ...<sup>9</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, great and mighty favored of Marduk, grand prince, beloved of Nebo, the contended one, seeker after wisdom.... When Marduk the great lord exalted my head and gave me far dwelling peoples to shepherd I unto Marduk my lord was faithful without ceasing. The sacred places of Nebo his faithful child, favorite of my reign, I sought after constantly. I pondered intelligently on what is pleasing unto them. At that time unto Marduk, the great and powerful, the grand and mighty hero renowned ... lord of the gods, the exalted, radiant light champion of the gods his fathers, dweller of Esagila, lord of Babylon, great lord my lord I prayed.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, the first few years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule demonstrated great piety toward his own Babylonian pantheon with Marduk playing the most prominent role. His religious life as well as his politics and conquests closely echoed the policies and procedures of the last Assyrian kings as well as those of his father, Nabopolassar. Nebuchadnezzar recognized the sovereignty of pagan, Babylonian gods, but the God of Judah did not appear to be a deity for which he showed any concern. Yet YHWH had a sovereign plan that included the conquests of this foreign king who had quickly risen to a position of great prominence and authority.

Significantly, God had a sovereign plan that also included a tenacious hunt after the submission of Nebuchadnezzar's own heart. The king who had risen to a position of such great power would be required to recognize the sovereign King of heaven from whom all authority is derived and to whom every knee must eventually bow.

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<sup>8</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 97. Langdon also places the rebuilding of *Ebarra* at Sippar in the first years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (8).

<sup>10</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 147. The rebuilding of *Etemin-anki*, the ziggurat of Babylon was one of Nebuchadnezzar's earliest religious building projects, along with *Ebarra* (8).

### 3. The Manifestation of Divine Sovereignty

Thus, Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power occurred in a short span of time and his exaltation catapulted him to heights that few, if any, rulers before him had attained. While Nebuchadnezzar would have been vaguely familiar with the God of Judah and the location and practices of the temple in Jerusalem, his first personal encounter with the one, true God came in the form of dreams which troubled his spirit and prevented him from sleep. Nebuchadnezzar's first lesson regarding the LORD's sovereignty is that this God has unlimited knowledge.

Early in his reign (the spring of 602 BC), the king had questions about events to come and was troubled over dreams that he had in the night.<sup>11</sup> When he could not sleep, he then summoned the religious advisors who had served his father before him with the demand recorded in Daniel 2:5, “If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.”

It appears that the young monarch had begun to recognize an inability within his Chaldean councilors to communicate with or to understand the gods and powers which they represented. Whether he had forgotten his dream or was merely testing their ability to accurately represent their gods, Nebuchadnezzar perceived that his dream had revealed future events.<sup>12</sup> If indeed the future was known by a sovereign deity, Nebuchadnezzar reasoned that certainly that god's representatives could also ascertain what the dream had contained, as well as its interpretation. Inversely, “the king reasoned

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel 2:1 records that these events occurred in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, yet Daniel 1:5-6 states that the four youths were trained for three years before they were brought before the king and advanced (1:18-20), Daniel himself becoming the “ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over the wise men” (4:48-49). This is not a contradiction and thus the sovereignty and omniscience of the God who inspired Scripture does not need to be called into question. Quite simply, the first year of their training would have coincided with the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar (7 September 605 – 5 April 604 BC). The second year coincided with his first regnal year (604/603) and the third year of their training would have culminated at the end of the king's second year (603/602), which remains in agreement with Daniel 2:1. Therefore, the events of Daniel 2 likely took place in the spring of 602 BC just before the Babylonian *Akitu* festival.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman, vol.23 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 87; and Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 81.

that if [the wise men] could not recall the past, their predictions concerning the future could not be trusted.”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, he called out the wise men for what they were, “I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time.... You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation” (2:8-9). They proclaimed that no man could do so. The king’s word was firm, so in his anger he issued his decree to kill all the wise men, including Daniel and his companions.

But God revealed the mystery to Daniel in a vision and Daniel in turn blessed the God of heaven with a hymn of praise. Though the song was not sung in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, the hymn serves as a commentary on the present subject of God’s sovereignty and merits a few remarks. We live in a world that is out of control, but we serve a sovereign God who is not. The temptation to worry, to doubt, or to forget God’s omniscience may increase the more the world’s rulers lose control of the times they live in. Daniel offers a hymn of praise which serves as a reminder that wisdom and might belong to God.

He changes times and seasons;  
he removes kings and sets up kings;  
he gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to those who have understanding;  
he reveals deep and hidden things;  
he knows what is in the darkness,  
and the light dwells with him (2:21-22).

Daniel’s anthem declares God’s sovereignty and omniscience, but the young sage ended his hymn with a final note of thanks and praise. This is the response due to a God who reigns in sovereign majesty. He gives wisdom and might to the righteous because those qualities belong to him alone as the sovereign, heavenly King.

In our present age, we would do best not to forget Daniel’s response when his world had seemed to have fallen out from under him. Daniel and his friends prayed for mercy and God shared what

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<sup>13</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Old Testament Volume (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 1333.

belonged to him. Therefore, his people must “bless the name of God forever and ever” (2:20) and they must “give thanks and praise” to the one who gives wisdom and might (2:23). These are his due in the midst of any and every circumstance.

Daniel proceeded to share the wisdom of God with the king in order that he might know the interpretation to dream. He described the great image made of precious metals and clay which was broken by a stone carved from a mountain (2:31-35). He also told the interpretation of four kingdoms of men which shall be brought to an end by a kingdom set up by the God of heaven (2:36-45).

In the years previous to his vision, Nebuchadnezzar had attributed his lordship, his greatness, his might, his sovereignty over the peoples, and his duty to restore the glory of his gods’ temples. All these he attributed to the choice and sovereignty of his Babylonian gods. To Marduk, especially, he prayed for favor upon the work of his hands. But in that spring of 602 BC, Nebuchadnezzar encountered the God of Judah through a dream and the interpretation given by a Judean youth nearing the completion of his education. The particular message regarding the reign of Nebuchadnezzar was that it was to him “whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold” (2:37-38).

The God of Judah delivered a message regarding his sovereignty to the most powerful man on earth, first demonstrating his unlimited knowledge. He showed that he knew the future and he declared that the kingdoms were under his authority; they only excelled according to his design and their end was already established.

#### **4. The Response of Nebuchadnezzar (2:46-49)**

Nebuchadnezzar responded to Daniel’s interpretation according to his cultural traditions and according to his promise that “if you show me the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor” (Dan 2:6). The text records that “King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him” (2:46) and he “gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect

over all the wise men of Babylon” (2:48). While his friends were also elevated, Daniel himself “remained at the king’s court” (2:49).

There is a temptation to attribute false worship on the part of the king, but Daniel’s response is not recorded and the text itself does not condemn Nebuchadnezzar’s actions. While **תָּהֹד** usually refers to ‘worship’ before God or an idol (Dan 3:5-28), it may also have the distinction to ‘show honor’ much as **תִּתְּהַנֵּן** does in Hebrew (cf. Isa 45:14; 49:23; 60:14). Miller argues, “Although aware that Daniel was not divine … the Babylonian ruler ordered that these offerings be accorded to Daniel as Yahweh’s representative.”<sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar’s homage to Daniel was not equal to his worship before his gods, but merely signifies a demonstration of great respect and honor accorded to the messenger of the God who revealed the mystery to Daniel. The king himself says as much in the next verse (Dan 2:47).

Whereas his response to Daniel was to pay honor and gifts to the young captive, his immediate response to Daniel’s God was to acknowledge his praise in regard to that which he had witnessed. He recognized that this God was able to accomplish what no other gods could or would do (“Your God is God of gods”). His response recognized God’s sovereignty over human domains (“and Lord of kings”). And he indirectly acknowledged God’s omniscience (“and a revealer of mysteries”).

However, Nebuchadnezzar did not shift his allegiance to Daniel’s God nor did he alter his belief in a pantheon of many gods. Daniel’s God merely became one more deity that was worthy enough to be recognized as existing among them. The day’s events were tremendous enough for him to elevate a captive youth and his friends to tremendous positions of authority and power and to offer many gifts to Daniel, but beyond a verbal acknowledgment regarding what Daniel’s God could do, it appears that he did not deem it appropriate to elevate this God to a similar position of authority and power in his own life. Nor did he offer this God any gifts or sacrifices appropriate to the demonstration of sovereignty and knowledge which God had shown.

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<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Daniel*, 103. Cf. Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 75; who asserts that “Nebuchadnezzar was worshiping, though probably not really Daniel but the God to whom Daniel gave all credit.

The events recorded in Nebuchadnezzar's own inscriptions demonstrate that little had changed in his relationship with Judah's God, nor did it alter his treatment of the nation of Judah. In fact he only became more ruthless. Soon after Daniel interpreted his dreams, he attributed the title "lord of lords" to his own god, Marduk.<sup>15</sup> The book of Daniel also notes this lack of true devotion to Judah's God, for the narrative immediately transitions to the next event of importance and begins by explaining "King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold" (3:1).

## B. Nebuchadnezzar and Divine Sovereignty in Daniel 3

### 1. The Historical Context

#### a. Constructing an Empire

In the year after Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, his reign continued much as before. At home, he continued his building projects. In the field, he ventured into the Levant to collect much tribute and remind his subjects of his sovereignty, including that which would have been due from Jehoiakim, king of Judah (2 Kings 24:1).

Finally, in his fourth year (601 BC) Nebuchadnezzar ventured to the border of Egypt where his forces met the armies of Pharaoh Necho. There they "joined in a pitched battle. They both inflicted heavy losses. The king of Akkad turned back with his troops and [went back] to Babylon."<sup>16</sup> There he spent almost two years recuperating and rebuilding his army. He would not venture into Syria again until December 599 BC.

Nebuchadnezzar's great losses seem to have encouraged the Judean puppet king to rebel against his Babylonian oppressor at this time. Jehoiakim enjoyed his new-found independence, but any satisfaction was short lived, for soon after his rebellion, bands of

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<sup>15</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 89. Langdon notes that the "Middle Hill Cylinder" was written early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign during a time of peace. Therefore, he dates the inscription around the years 600–593 BC (11). While the events of Daniel 3 likely occurred several years later, several inscriptions demonstrate his continued veneration of the Babylonian pantheon in the years immediately following. One prism (EŠ 7834), located in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, is dated to the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar and details the construction of his palace. The above mentioned "Middle Hill Cylinder," contains a close resemblance. They proclaim his devotion to his gods, the sacrifices he made to them, the buildings that he built for them, and the peace that was established under his rule. See Rocio Da Riva, "Nebuchadnezzar II's Prism (EŠ 7834): A New Edition" in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 103 (2) (2013): 196-229.

<sup>16</sup> Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 229.

raiders began to barrage Judah to the point of destruction (2 Kings 24:2-4). Finally, the Babylonian master returned to Jerusalem where Jehoiakim had recently been killed and replaced by his son, Jehoiachin, in 598 BC.<sup>17</sup> After a two-month siege, the young king surrendered himself on 16 March 597 BC (2 Kings 24:11-12) and Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle on the throne, where Zedekiah would reign until the Babylonian king later destroyed Jerusalem. A month after Jehoiachin's surrender, he was taken captive to Babylon along with the officials and mighty men of Jerusalem, 10,000 more captive Jews (including Ezekiel), the king's treasures, and the golden vessels from the temple (2 Kings 24:12-17; 2 Chron 36:10).

Nebuchadnezzar squelched more rebellions in the following two years. However, this time the uprising took place much closer to home. In his ninth year he met Babylon's eastern neighbor on the banks of the Tigris where he turned the king of Elam back to his own country in fear. In December 595 BC, a rebellion took place in Babylonia itself obliging Nebuchadnezzar to execute many of his own troops.<sup>18</sup> By February 594 BC, he had captured his adversary, but the potential for unrest had been made clear to Nebuchadnezzar. So also was the necessity for a program that would remind his subjects of his greatness and his might and that would discourage further unrest at home or abroad.

During Nebuchadnezzar's first years as king, he asserted his authority first with the sword and then by mandating annual tribute. He had already established his superiority to the armies of Egypt in 605 BC and thereafter declared his dominion throughout the west in order to maintain the economic benefits of several vassal kingdoms. Essentially, he had continued his father's strategy to conquer and loot. However, following Nebuchadnezzar's impasse with Egypt and the

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<sup>17</sup> The events surrounding the death of Jehoiakim remain somewhat of a mystery. Cf. 2 Kings 24:5; 2 Chron 36:6. Jehoiakim was bound in bronze fetters either in 605 or 598 BC, but Nebuchadnezzar seems to have changed his mind, either allowing him to continue as his servant (if 605) or choosing to kill Jehoiakim instead (if 598). He died either by assassination, suicide, or possibly by Nebuchadnezzar himself, but his early obituary was tainted with disgrace (Jer 22:18-19; 30:30-31). Jehoiachin had taken his father's place on the Judean throne on 9 December 598 BC, but the Babylonian Chronicles do not record any movement by Nebuchadnezzar until the following month (Glassner, 231) when he came to Jerusalem for the two-month siege, which spanned the majority of Jehoiachin's brief reign.

<sup>18</sup> Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 231.

rebellion of kingdoms like Judah and Elam, his foreign policy seems to have shifted.

At the turn of the century, he began a more concentrated propaganda war which emphasized his achievements, his might, and most notably his superiority to the kings of Egypt. His policy of routine military expeditions into Syria and Lebanon served to expand Babylonian power, but was exercised in a manner that discouraged alliances with Egypt and punished any ruler (and their cities) that dared to cross political lines.<sup>19</sup> As rebellion increased in proportion to Egypt's dissemination of political sabotage, the economic benefits of his vassal kingdoms became less important to Nebuchadnezzar than his priority of eradicating the influence of the Egyptian pharaohs themselves. His priority was to command absolute loyalty, even if the cost was to decimate those cities and states which had demonstrated alliances with Egypt.<sup>20</sup> This destruction progressed as the years passed from taking great spoils to taking vast numbers of captives and then to destroying insurgent cities altogether.

### **b. Raising Images**

Public inscriptions and monuments were one of the means that Nebuchadnezzar used to remind his subjects of his greatness and his authority. For example, three grand inscriptions have been found on the rock walls of the Lebanon valleys. Nebuchadnezzar's inscription at Nahr al-Kalb ("Dog River") is actually just one of many that was left for travelers to notice and take warning. Almost seven hundred years earlier, Ramses II had left three inscriptions during his Syrian campaigns at the same location. Five Assyrian inscriptions including one by Esarhaddon had been etched into the same rock in the century

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<sup>19</sup> Rocío Da Riva, "The Nebuchadnezzar Rock Inscription at Nahr el-Kalb," in *Le Site du Nahr el-Kalb*, ed. Anne-Marie Afeiche, Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaise, Hors Série V (Beirut: Ministry of Culture, 2009), 255-302; reprint, Academia.edu, [http://www.academia.edu/2110187/\\_The\\_Nebuchadnezzar\\_Inscription\\_in\\_Nahr\\_el-Kalb\\_pp.\\_255-302\\_in\\_A.\\_M.\\_Afeiche\\_ed.\\_Le\\_Site\\_du\\_Nahr\\_el-Kalb\\_BAAL\\_Hors\\_Série\\_11.\\_Beirut\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Culture\\_Republic\\_of\\_Libanon\\_2009](http://www.academia.edu/2110187/_The_Nebuchadnezzar_Inscription_in_Nahr_el-Kalb_pp._255-302_in_A._M._Afeiche_ed._Le_Site_du_Nahr_el-Kalb_BAAL_Hors_Série_11._Beirut_Ministry_of_Culture_Republic_of_Libanon_2009) (accessed Jan 23, 2015), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Baked bricks and bitumen are commonly referenced throughout many of Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions. However, it may be significant that the final three inscriptions which Langdon dates to the years 600–593 BC (Nebuchadnezzar 1, 3, and 16) and one inscription dated to about 592 (Nebuchadnezzar 13) all contain increased references to the baking of bricks. In particular, his account of the building of E-harsag-ella devotes whole paragraphs describing the size and making of the burnt brick. "With mortar and burnt bricks mountain high I erected the temple" (67). He also utters special prayer for the destruction of his foes (69) and "With thy terrible weapons smite the rebellious, devastate all the territory of my enemies" (71).

before Nebuchadnezzar. And since then, many more have inscribed their accomplishments in stone (including one by Napoleon III in AD 1861). For Nebuchadnezzar, these royal images served as a reminder to the people that the land and resources belonged to his god, that the enemy king (i.e. Egypt) needed to be removed because he and his palaces were “unfit for the magnificence of such resources,” and that Nebuchadnezzar had liberated the people from the “covetousness of the enemy” (i.e. Egypt).<sup>21</sup>

The monuments each include reliefs of Nebuchadnezzar, sometimes fighting a lion and sometimes looking toward Syria.<sup>22</sup> Next to his image at the Wadi Brisa inscription he wrote:

(I did) what no former king had done: I cut off the high mountains, I split the stones of the mountains, and I opened passes (into the mountains), I established a road for the cedars for my king Marduk.... I let the inhabitants of Lebanon lie in safe pastures, I did not allow anyone to frighten them. So that nobody should oppress [them], I have [put] an eternal image of my royal person, [...] I made [...] I myself [...] I put [...] [I gathered?] the wi[despread] people in the whole inha[bited] world]. I wrote an inscription with my royal image in a mountain pass, (and) I established (it) for ever after.”<sup>23</sup>

These inscriptions were likely etched in stone closer to the siege of Jerusalem which took place from 588 to 586 BC.<sup>24</sup> However, these images are mentioned at this point because of the similar terms and purpose which are demonstrated for the creation of the image made in Daniel 3. It is often assumed that the events of this story followed in close succession to the dreams of the previous chapter, and thus it is also assumed that the image was made in the form of a man.

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<sup>21</sup> Da Riva, “Nebuchadnezzar Rock Inscription,” 17.

<sup>22</sup> Da Riva, “A Lion in the Cedar Forest: International Politics and Pictorial Self-Representations of Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC),” in *Studies on War in the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays on Military History*, ed. Jordi Vidal, Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 372 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2010), 173–6.

<sup>23</sup> Da Riva, “Nebuchadnezzar Rock Inscription,” 17.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Langdon who feels with some certainty that the inscription dates to the siege of Jerusalem (*Building Inscriptions*, 17) and Da Riva who asserts only that the inscription must come from later in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign because of the referenced buildings, but beyond this one cannot be more specific (“Nebuchadnezzar Rock Inscription,” 20–21). It is the opinion of this writer that the period during the siege of Jerusalem (588–586 BC) or possibly during the siege of Tyre (586–573 BC) fit the context better than the latter years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (572–562 BC).

However, the proportions (sixty cubits by six cubits: a 10:1 ratio) would be ill fitting for the image of a human being.<sup>25</sup>

The opinion of this writer is that the image bore more similarities to the Wadi Brisa and Nahr el-Kalb inscriptions rather than to a giant statue like the Colossus of Rhodes or the Statue of Liberty. In fact, the dimensions of the image set up on the plain of Dura are precisely the same as those of the ancient obelisks of Egypt. These erected towers were celebrations of Egyptian gods, of life, and of the pharaohs, but they were also inscribed all around with images and inscriptions that communicated stories, propaganda, and provided a strong statement glorifying the rule of the pharaohs.<sup>26</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions in Lebanon share the same characteristics and even included images of Nebuchadnezzar himself. The main difference was that they were inscribed onto the face of cliff walls instead of four-sided columns. It is very possible that the king built an obelisk near Babylon which repeated similar inscriptions to those he had left in different places throughout his empire.<sup>27</sup> It is also possible that such an obelisk would have born his image as a reminder of his sovereignty, even as he had etched his image elsewhere for the same purpose. However, this tower rivaled those of Egypt and it stood many cubits taller. Into whatever form the image was cast, it served the purpose to unite his empire and to fortify his sovereignty. It cried out, "My kingdom is bigger, I am mightier, Babylon is better."

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Miller, *Daniel*, 109-10; Wood, *Commentary on Daniel*, 79-80; and John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and John D. W. Watts, vol. 30. (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 69-70; who each assert that the image was perhaps intended to look "grotesque" and may have even been an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself or that its height may have included a large pedestal.

<sup>26</sup> Michael DeJager, "The Obelisk: Ancient Politics & Religion," Honors Advisory Seminar (Denver: Johnson and Wales University, 2011), 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> Though circumstantial, two other arguments should be offered regarding the image as an obelisk. First, the ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, in his description of the Seven Wonders of the World, gave an account of a giant Babylonian obelisk. Although he attributes its creation to a more ancient legendary figure, he does describe its creation and presence in Babylonia as a site to behold (2.11.4-5). Secondly, other ancient inscriptions were erected by other kings in various forms. For example, on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, he also spoke of setting up *images* of his royal majesty. Upon those *images* he wrote of the things he had done, which contextually demonstrates that the image was not necessarily a statue of a man, but was instead a structure or tablet that was written upon. See Goldingay, *Daniel*, 1337; and William Harris Rule, *An Historical Exposition of the Book of Daniel the Prophet* (London: Seeley, Jackson, & Halliday, 1869), 97-100.

### c. Fortifying Loyalty

Furthermore, the building of this golden image did not necessarily follow immediately after the events of Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold fits better into a context in which he was trying to quell rebellion and unify his empire. Two biblical passages may hint at the approximate date for the events of the fiery furnace.<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah 29:20-23 makes reference to two false prophets whom Jeremiah predicted would be judged for their sin and would be roasted in the fire. The letter was written soon after the captivity of Jehoiachin (597 BC). This is not to say that Nebuchadnezzar never used fire for executions before these events, nor that he stopped executing by quartering his victims (Dan 2:5; 3:29), nor that he did not use other unrecorded methods to eradicate insurgents. However, the reference to Nebuchadnezzar burning men alive may be significant as it demonstrates other examples during the first decade of the sixth century BC.

Additionally, Jeremiah 51:59 makes mention of the king of Judah journeying to Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign (594/3 BC) along with Seraiah, one of his officials. Daniel 3 lists seven specific groups of officials which Nebuchadnezzar had gathered from the provinces of his empire. The first group was labeled 'satraps,' a Persian loan word used to describe the prince or governor of one of Nebuchadnezzar's provinces. The third group, labeled 'governors,' also referred to high governing officials over provinces. Zedekiah, though he was a member of the Judean royal family line, may have been included in one of these categories, most likely the first. Thus, Zedekiah's Babylonian visit may have been for the very occasion which is described in Daniel 3.<sup>29</sup> Is it possible that

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<sup>28</sup> It may be significant that the LXX text of Daniel 3:1 provides the eighteenth year (587/6 BC) of Nebuchadnezzar as the historical setting for this chapter, even though this is likely a later addition which was redacted into the Greek text.

<sup>29</sup> William Shea also makes a case for the distinct possibility that Zedekiah's venture to Babylon was for the purpose of affirming his loyalty and bowing down before the golden image. He writes, "Zedekiah's trip to Babylon can be seen as part of a loyalty program for foreign kings that we see promulgated for Babylonian officials in the third chapter of Daniel" (37). See William H. Shea, "Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts and the Convocation on the Plain of Dura" in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 20 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press: 1982), 32-37. He also demonstrates many parallels between the list of officials in Daniel 3 and the Nebuchadnezzar cylinder ascribed to his seventh year (37-44).

the three Judean youths stood before Nebuchadnezzar even as they watched their own king bow down to the image of gold?

In review, following his unsuccessful battle against Egypt in 601 BC, Nebuchadnezzar was confronted with several rebellions and unrest across his empire. Jehoiakim rebelled in 601. The king of Elam rebelled in 596 and an insurrection took place in Akkad in 595. Nebuchadnezzar quelled the Babylonian uprising and executed the insurrectionist in 594. Then in the spring of 593, Zedekiah received ambassadors from the surrounding nations to begin consideration of a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar given the promise of security from Psamtik, pharaoh of Egypt (Jer 27). This was the same year that Zedekiah was called to Babylon to appear before Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 51:59-64).

Maintaining control of his previously conquered lands proved difficult to achieve. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar made a shift in foreign policy in order to consolidate power and assert his superiority to the kings of Egypt. Both Zedekiah's appearance in Babylon as well as the occasion at which Nebuchadnezzar commanded his officials to worship before the golden image (if in fact, these two events do not represent the same occasion) demonstrate that the Babylonian king was demanding fidelity and building loyalty among his subjects.

## **2. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride**

So the king of Babylon sought to demonstrate to his domains that his kingdom was greater than all others and that he had accomplished what no kings before him had done. He often pitted himself against the pharaohs of Egypt, sometimes even boasting his achievements beside their own as he inscribed images along public roads. In Daniel 3:2, he “sent to gather … all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image.” Nebuchadnezzar wanted to be abundantly clear to all people under his authority: His kingdom was bigger; it was mightier; and it was better.

It may be said that Nebuchadnezzar's program made good political sense. He had been given a mighty empire and good stewardship requires a sovereign to use the sword, for he is the “avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:4). Rebellion was in the air and Nebuchadnezzar had a responsibility to halt it. Additionally, he saw himself as a shepherd of the people who did what was right for them (at least from his perspective). In and of

itself, his command to gather the officials together, that they might reaffirm their oaths, was wise and right. John Walvoord expressed that “this ceremony [was] in keeping with the times. Such a display of officials was on the one hand a gratifying demonstration of the power of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire and on the other hand was significant as recognizing the deities who in their thinking were responsible for their victories. The worship of the image was intended to be an expression of political solidarity and loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar rather than an intended act of religious persecution … although it may also have had religious connotation.”<sup>30</sup>

But it was in his pride that Nebuchadnezzar continued to worship false gods, even after Daniel’s God had demonstrated himself to be a revealer of mysteries and greater than any of Babylon’s gods had been proven to be. Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Judah and captured their king. “He expressed his pride further by demanding others to “serve his gods” and to “worship the golden image” (3:12, 14, 28), a demand further aggravated by his threat to cast those who did not fall down and worship into the furnace (3:6, 11, 15).

It is possible that the image bore his likeness in the form of reliefs combined with an account of his own accomplishments. If this was so, then he was elevating himself and demanding worship from his own subjects. His sense of self-importance was deeply rooted and was made evident by the furious rage he exhibited when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to serve his gods or worship the golden image (3:13, 19).<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The Manifestation of Divine Sovereignty

However, YHWH is supreme. It is he who created all things, holds all things together, and works in and through all things. There is nothing in the universe that escapes his grasp or that has slipped

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<sup>30</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 82.

<sup>31</sup> William Shea presents a convincing case that Daniel’s three friends were included in the list on the Nebuchadnezzar prism as the chief of the royal merchants (Hanunu/Hananiah), an overseer of the slave girls (Muallim-Marduk/Meshach), and the secretary of the crown prince Evil-merodach (Ardi-Nabu/Abednego). See William H. Shea, “Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts and the Convocation on the Plain of Dura” in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 20 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press: 1982), 38, 46-50. If Shea has correctly identified Abednego as one holding a position close to the king’s son, this may provide a hint that their refusal had hit a much more personal nerve.

beyond his control. And yet within his divine sovereignty, the Creator allows for human freedom to exist and has provided free will to each soul.

The Scripture also teaches that God calls men unto himself. He is at work within the circumstances of human lives to draw them into a relationship. Still, God is a gentleman. When a man says, “No!” God does not forcefully take his will away from him to replace it with his own, though he may forcefully orchestrate the events of one’s life to reinforce each man’s need for their relationship with a Savior. God may convict, allow suffering, give or take; but in each life, he works sovereignly to bring glory to himself and to provide opportunity for that life to respond to the divine Sovereign. All of this is composed in such a way that every individual who becomes a partaker of God’s grace will have no one to give credit to except the sovereign God who saved them. And every individual who rejects God’s grace, thus living their life and eternity separate from the sovereign God, will have no one to blame but oneself.

Nebuchadnezzar was no exception. He serves as an example of a king who was raised up through divinely arranged circumstances and who was forcefully beckoned to submit to the God who reigns sovereignly over all. After he learned of God’s infinite knowledge through the interpretation of his dreams, Nebuchadnezzar continued to serve his own gods and when he attempted to force God’s people into the same service, God used three young men to teach the king another lesson about the one who is able to do all things.

Faced with the prospect of an agonizing death for rejecting the king’s command, the three men answered him, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan 3:16-18). He had been told of a God who reveals mysteries and now he was confronted with a God who is able to deliver. The statement boldly reminded Nebuchadnezzar of his limitations and also implied that the God of Judah is bigger, he is mightier, and he is far better than any of the king’s so-called gods.

Nebuchadnezzar responded to the challenge in full force by ordering the furnace to be heated seven times more than usual. The heat was so overbearing that the king's own mighty men perished in the flames while throwing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace (3:19-23). Yet for all that Nebuchadnezzar did to incinerate his challengers, their bonds were loosed, they walked freely in the midst of the furnace without suffering, and they were joined by a fourth who was an angel from God. God had his way and Nebuchadnezzar was forced to recognize which God was actually able to deliver.

#### **4. The Response of Nebuchadnezzar (3:26-30)**

The king immediately reacted to God's display of power and intervention as he called the men to come out of the furnace. Years earlier he had acknowledged that "your God is God of gods" (2:47) and once again he was faced with the reality of what this mighty God was able to do that superseded the ability of his own gods. In the presence of his other officials, he again declared that these men were "servants of the Most High God" (3:26).

It is commendable that the king's first response was to acknowledge the superiority of this great God and then to offer praise. He offered praise to their God and then he offered his approval to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for their faithfulness and trust (3:28). Additionally he recognized the righteousness of their decision to disobey his command and the righteousness of their devotion to the one and only God.

Additionally, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree protecting the worship of the God of Judah. However, the reason behind the decree demonstrates that the king had learned something about this God: "there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" (3:30). Thus he had become acquainted with YHWH's unlimited knowledge and now he was given a small demonstration of YHWH's unlimited power. So he again acknowledged the superiority of their God.

Still, Nebuchadnezzar made no demonstration of personal commitment to the God of Judah, nor did he renounce the gods of Babylon whom he had admitted could not do the things that this God did. Though he promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, he would very soon destroy their native city; and though his decree sanctioned the worship of the God of Judah, in a few short years he

would burn that God's temple to the ground. He had still not personally acknowledge YHWH's sovereignty and he still worshipped his own gods.

### C. Nebuchadnezzar and Divine Sovereignty in Daniel 4

#### 1. The Historical Context

##### a. The Path to Mighty Power

While Nebuchadnezzar was learning his second lesson about God's sovereignty, Pharaoh Psamtik was consolidating his own power in Egypt. During his third year (593/2 BC), he moved south where he invaded the heartland of Nubia in order to neutralize his neighboring enemy. Aglow with victory, Psamtik ventured into Judah in the following year when he encouraged Zedekiah and his allies into further rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>32</sup> Psamtik died in 589 BC and was succeeded by his son, Apries, but his determination found its fruition later on that year when Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by sending ambassadors to Egypt asking for aid, though Zedekiah had sworn an oath of fealty to his Babylonian master (2 Kings 24:20; 2 Chron 36:13; Ezek 17:11-15).

Nebuchadnezzar responded to this new revolt by bringing his army against Jerusalem where he built siege works and began a two and one-half year barricade.<sup>33</sup> The siege began on 15 January 588 BC. Jeremiah provides a glimpse of the devastation found throughout the entire region of Judah when the prophet recorded that at some point

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<sup>32</sup> Alan B. Lloyd, "The Late Period" in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 372; Peter Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 196.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah 39:1-2, at first glance, seems to imply that the siege only lasted one and one-half years. Thus it is often argued that the siege ended in 587 BC, or sometimes that the siege began in 587 and ended in 586 BC. However, it is important to recognize that two calendars were used in Judah during the ministry of Jeremiah: the religious calendar upon which the people calculated the months of the year (the first month being in the spring) and the civil calendar upon which the kings reckoned the years of their reign (in Judah, the regnal years turned over in the fall). Thus in the fall, the sixth month of a king's eighth year would be followed by the seventh month of his ninth year. In the spring, the twelfth month of his ninth year would be followed by the first month of his ninth year. It is this latter example which at first seems contradictory, but demonstrates the explanation given in Jeremiah. The siege of Jerusalem lasted from 15 January 588 to 18 July 586 BC. This will become important later in order to build a chronology of Nebuchadnezzar's whereabouts.

early in the siege, only two other fortified cities remained, Lachish and Azekah (Jer 34:7); all else had been lost.<sup>34</sup>

However, around 588 BC, Pharaoh Apries took advantage of Nebuchadnezzar's preoccupation with Jerusalem and chose to contest Babylonian dominion. Early in his reign, Apries took control of Cyprus, giving Egypt greater control over the Mediterranean as well as a naval base close to the Phoenician coast. Then in 587 BC, he attacked Tyre, Sidon, and the plains of Phoenicia, after which he turned his attention to the relief of Jerusalem (Jer 37:1-10; 47:1).<sup>35</sup> This bold, but foolish move forced the Chaldean army to withdraw from Jerusalem in order to drive Pharaoh's army back into its own land where the Egyptians would return defeated and remain long beyond the reign of the Babylonian empire. Jerusalem experienced a reprieve from the siege, albeit short and futile, for Nebuchadnezzar's army returned to Jerusalem (probably in the summer of 587) where they starved out its inhabitants until a breach was made in the wall on 18 July 586 BC (2 Kings 25:3-4).

Zedekiah and his men of war fled, but were pursued to the plains of Jericho after which he was taken to Riblah and was judged in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar; his sons were slaughtered and his own eyes were put out before he himself was drug into captivity in chains. After a month of occupation, the city was destroyed on 14 August and the temple itself was burned down three days later.

Soon after the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar continued his destruction of the alliance, next turning his attention to the Phoenician city of Tyre. Mere months after the fall of Jerusalem, his army began a siege of the coastal city which would last thirteen years (586–573 BC). Over this span of time, Nebuchadnezzar divided his army into at least three camps: one portion of his army remained at Tyre for the duration of the siege, he invested at least one other portion in

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<sup>34</sup> Pritchard, *ANET*, 322. The Lachish Ostraca contain a collection of correspondence from the fortified city during the time of the siege before Lachish finally fell. Azekah presumably fell first, for its signal fires could no longer be seen at the time Ostracon IV was written.

<sup>35</sup> Several prophecies were proclaimed against Pharaoh and Egypt in the first six months of 587 BC which may indicate the timing of Apries' failed attempt to usurp Nebuchadnezzar's power. Jeremiah 37, 46:13-28, and 47 are not dated, but occurred before Jeremiah was thrown into the dungeon in the house of Jonathan (Jer 37:11-16; 38:28). Ezekiel also proclaimed three prophecies that were dated to 7 Jan 587 BC (Ezek 29:1-16), 29 Apr 587 BC (Ezek 30:20-26), and 21 Jun 587 BC (Ezek 31). Each prophecy foretold the defeat of Egypt.

other military operations, and Nebuchadnezzar himself was known to have operated from his northern base in Riblah (2 Kings 25:6, 20-21; Jer 39:5; 52:9-10, 26-27). For example, in his twenty-third year (582/1 BC), his forces again ventured into Judah where they carried away even more captives (Jer 52:30) even while the siege of Tyre was in progress. Josephus gave account of further military operations which also took place during this same year into the Valley of Lebanon as well as into Ammon and Moab.<sup>36</sup>

Several nearby inscriptions may provide a glimpse of Nebuchadnezzar's pride and the progression of his thoughts during this time. The Wadi-Brisa inscriptions (as well as the inscription at Shir es-Sanam and the reliefs at Wadi es-Saba) stand about 22.5 kilometers west of Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's base of operations. The Nahr el-Kalb inscription is etched into the rock about half-way to Tyre along the coastal road, just north of present day Beirut. Langdon dates the Wadi-Brisa inscriptions to the period around the sieges of Jerusalem and Tyre.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, while his gods received a great amount of praise, these inscriptions include more frequent attention to Nabu, “the beloved of his reign,” and incidentally the god to which Nebuchadnezzar's own name gives tribute. There are also increased references to his works and to his accomplishments “which no former king had done before.” Nebuchadnezzar continued to give praise to his gods, but by this point his focus was turning more and more to his own accomplishments.

By the middle of his third decade as king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had established the might of his power. From his early battles to the quelling of rebellion in the 590's BC to the desolation he wrought upon the nations which had allied themselves to Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar had proven himself strong and not to be

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<sup>36</sup> Josephus *Ant.* 10.181.

<sup>37</sup> See Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 21-22. Cf. Da Riva, who has recently proposed that the Wadi-Brisa inscriptions come from the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign because they mention Nebuchadnezzar's “Median Wall.” The Wadi-Brisa monuments were substantial and would have taken a great deal of time to complete as the writings are cut into a surface 5.5 meters long by 3 meters high. It is the opinion of the current writer that these inscriptions date from the time Nebuchadnezzar was laying siege to Jerusalem and Tyre, but were likely not completed until the end of the third decade of his reign when the “Median Wall” was known to have begun construction (577 BC). See Rocío Da Riva, “Just Another Brick in the Median Wall,” in *Urartu and Its Neighbors: Festschrift in Honor of Nicolay Harutyunyan in Occasion of His 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Aram Kosyan et al, Aramazd: Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies V, (Yerevan: 2010), 65.

trifled with. He had rebuilt grand cities with their temples and palaces. He had become a king of unparalleled might and power.

### b. The Arrival of Madness

Among those who accept the historicity of Daniel 4 and its account of Nebuchadnezzar's divinely appointed boanthropy, a clear time frame for which these events took place has not found consensus.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to be overly dogmatic, but it is the opinion of this writer that the seven “times” of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness represented a period of seven years. Furthermore, it is the hypothesis of this writer that the latter years of the siege of Tyre provide a reasonable setting for his time of humiliation.

Some have proposed that the “seven periods of time” mentioned in Daniel 4 represent just seven months, weeks, or days. While this interpretation is possible, it is not likely. First, the account itself states that the king’s hair grew as eagle’s feathers and his nails grew as bird’s claws. While seven months is certainly long enough to provide anyone with a serious case of a “bad hair day,” the description seems to require a longer duration of time. Secondly, the legendary account of the “Prayer of Nabonidus” seems to be a conflated account of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness and Nabonidus’ ten-year self-exile to Arabia. In the fragment, Nabonidus claims to have been smitten with his illness for “seven years.”<sup>39</sup> Thus it may be seen that one early interpretation of “seven times” was in fact a period of seven years. Finally, the use of “times” in similar contexts within Daniel itself and New Testament literature reflects an interpretation of seven years.<sup>40</sup>

However, equating the “seven times” as seven years creates a perceived problem. At what point in the life and reign of Nebuchadnezzar could it be said that he was “driven from among men” and that he “ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers”? Nebuchadnezzar was introduced to world history in 607 BC as the

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<sup>38</sup> Most scholars place the “seven times” of his insanity toward the latter years of his reign based on what may seem to be the conclusion of his building projects. For example, see Wood, *Commentary on Daniel*, 99; Miller, *Daniel*, 127; Donald K. Campbell, *Daniel: Decoder of Dreams* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977), 43.

<sup>39</sup> 4Q242, 2-3. Contrary to most contemporary scholarship, this author presumes that Daniel’s account is authentic and that the Qumran legend followed at a later date.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Dan 7:25; 12:7, 11 with Rev 12:14; 13:5-6 where “a time, times, and half a times” are equated with forty-two months and a period approximate to 1,290 days.

crown prince of Babylon. He ascended to the throne in 605 BC, his reign was well documented in Babylonian inscriptions over the next ten years, and the Old Testament Scriptures testify to his vibrant health and power in 597, 593, and 588–586 BC. The siege of Jerusalem ended in his nineteenth year and the siege of Tyre began within a few months. It did not culminate until 573 BC. Ezekiel testifies to his presence at the end of the siege (Ezek 26, 29) and likewise speaks of his presence in Egypt five years later (568/7 BC). A Babylonian fragment also attests to his presence in Egypt in the same year. He died six years later in the fall of 562 BC.

The simplest solution would be to conclude that the “seven periods of time” must have been months or weeks, or as most conclude, that the text of Daniel is merely historical fiction. This writer rejects the latter and also finds the former to be unlikely. I would like to present another possibility that is supported by two pieces of evidence, which demonstrate that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and seven years of madness may have occurred from 581 to 573 BC, during the final eight years of the siege of Tyre.

First, there is a gap in both biblical and Babylonian records during the final eight years of this siege. Biblical and secular scholars agree that Nebuchadnezzar’s base of operations was Riblah, just north of the present Lebanese-Syrian border. There is much evidence that Nebuchadnezzar was not present at the fall of Jerusalem, but his officers brought the captives to him. The same holds true for the siege of Tyre. It is plausible that Nebuchadnezzar maintained a presence at the beginning and end of the siege, but in all likelihood, it was his officers and his army that maintained it. This is supported by Josephus’ account that Nebuchadnezzar took another force into Lebanon, Ammon, and Moab in 582 BC, even while the siege continued without interruption. Additionally, it is unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar did not return to his home city of Babylon over the course of these thirteen years.

Along these lines of reasoning, the vision of Daniel 4 could have taken place as late as the spring or summer of 581 BC and his seven years of madness would have ensued the following year at the same time while he was home in Babylon. The conclusion to this period would have occurred by the spring of 573 BC, giving him several weeks or months to shave, trim his nails, apologize to his wife for his

beastly behavior, and to present himself at Tyre in time for its surrender sometime during his thirty-second regnal year. Therefore, there is a gap in the record of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in which the Babylonian king remained notably unaccounted for. No other time during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar coincides with the details of Daniel 4 as do the final eight years of the siege of Tyre.

Secondly, Nebuchadnezzar's later inscriptions make a notable shift in tone and religious content and then the inscriptions cease to appear. This is not to say that Nebuchadnezzar did not commission any other works, however the archaeological evidence as it currently stands remains strangely silent. At the least, the declaration of Daniel 4 was also recorded in addition to these writings. Granted, the absence of further inscriptions is an argument from silence, but the content and tone of these last writings should be enough to give one pause.

Langdon only assigned three documents from the years which he labels the period of political activity and building palaces (580–561 BC).<sup>41</sup> It is the opinion of this writer that these inscriptions may belong to the beginning of that period and that Daniel 4, along with Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Tyre, followed later.

The first inscription from this period included three stone cylinders found at the ziggurat in Borsa and contain nothing remarkable except to note that Nebuchadnezzar prays for “abundance of posterity, security of throne, a long reign, the slaughter of my foes, and the conquest of the land of my enemies.” These requests would be more fitting for a king entering his third decade of kingship than a king concluding his fourth decade and having already vanquished his enemies.<sup>42</sup>

The second inscription is a stone cylinder and the third is a tablet, both recording the building of two palaces in Babylon. The latter is better known as the “East India House Inscription” which

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<sup>41</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 21-22. In his thorough examination of Nebuchadnezzar's building inscriptions, Langdon dated three Babylonian inscriptions and several brick inscriptions to what he calls the period of “past conflict” (604–600 BC). He dated eleven inscriptions to the “period of peace and great activity in building temples” (600–593 BC). Then he identified only five inscriptions from the remaining years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (593–562 BC), including the Wadi-Brisa inscriptions mentioned before which he labels from the period of warlike expeditions” (593–580 BC). The Wadi-Brisa inscriptions, in the opinion of this writer, also belong to the years immediately before Nebuchadnezzar's madness.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 95.

uses the former as its model with several insertions from many of the previously mentioned documents.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the first (Br.Mus. 85, 4-30) speaks of one palace built on the hill to the north of Babylon, but this northern palace is never mentioned again in any other inscription.<sup>44</sup> More importantly, the tone of these inscriptions is altered from Nebuchadnezzar's earliest works. "We find only a system of writing the specialized history of the palaces and works in Babylon and Borsa.... The interests of the king seem to wane in matters of religion and to incline toward political affairs."<sup>45</sup> Ferguson adds to this, "Prayers show evidence of being copied from earlier sources. In reworking one of his closing prayers the king manages to insert eight of his own royal titles. Flaunting of royal traits before deity was totally absent in his earlier prayers."<sup>46</sup>

In summary, it has been demonstrated that Nebuchadnezzar reached the height of his power in the 580's after two decades of rule from Babylon. Rebellions had been quashed at home and abroad, the armies of Egypt had been chased home to the Nile and would never invade Babylonian territories again, Jerusalem had been destroyed and the temple of YHWH had been razed to the ground, and the prize of Tyre stood just within Nebuchadnezzar's grasp.

Furthermore, his renown was praised from one end of his kingdom to the other, his name and accomplishments etched into cliff walls, great monuments, and buildings alike. His name was even etched into the bricks of the Babylonian city, each a tribute to his greatness that would stand one upon the other for thousands of years to come. Babylon the great stood in all of its glory as an achievement of the great kingdom which he had built. More and more, the king spoke of his accomplishments; less and less, he gave credit to the gods of Babylon, not even to mention the sovereign God of Judah who had once demonstrated how much more magnificent he was in comparison.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 19. Is it possible that this palace might have something to do with the palace mentioned in Daniel 4?

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Ferguson, "Nebuchadnezzar, Gilgamesh, And The 'Babylonian Job,'" *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (1994): 322.

## 2. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride

The Jewish God gave multiple opportunities for Nebuchadnezzar to witness his power and sovereignty. YHWH had demonstrated his unlimited knowledge through the king's dreams and the interpretation that was revealed to a Judean youth. This God surpassed the abilities of any of the other gods which Nebuchadnezzar had encountered, and he acknowledged, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries" (Dan 2:47). Yet merely five years later, Nebuchadnezzar went on to take Judah's king as a captive along with 10,000 other Jews who belonged to this God.

YHWH had demonstrated his unlimited power through the deliverance of Daniel's three friends who had been thrown into the furnace of fire. This God was "the Most High God" (3:26) who had even protected the hair on their heads and the cloaks on their backs and even kept the smell of fire from coming upon them. The king had declared, "There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way (3:29). But within a decade, Nebuchadnezzar would burn the Most High God's temple to the ground and would bring desolation upon the land of this God's people.

Perhaps, at first, Nebuchadnezzar had recognized the greatness of this God and perhaps he even considered YHWH as great enough to be included among the pantheon of many other gods. But nothing in all of Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions or in the record of Daniel 1-3 indicates that the king had submitted himself to the sovereignty of this God or that he had ceased to worship the false deities of his Babylonian forefathers. On the contrary, Nebuchadnezzar's confidence turned more and more inward as the years progressed and as the power of his might was increased. He boasted less in the accomplishments of his own gods and became less concerned with what he had to offer them. And as time advanced he bragged more of the deeds that were brought about by his own hands. This is not to say that he rejected those gods or ceased to believe in their existence, but they began to take a back seat to his own glory. So Nebuchadnezzar became comfortable in the context of this ease and prosperity.

So YHWH once again orchestrated the events of Nebuchadnezzar's life in order to demonstrate his right to sovereignty and his demand for humility. Within the context in which Nebuchadnezzar was prospering in his palace, he had another dream

that resulted in fear and dismay. “As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me” (Dan 4:5).

Decades of pride had erased the lessons of previous encounters with this God, for Nebuchadnezzar turned once again to the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers who served the gods of Babylon. He even volunteered the dream without requiring them to make it known to him as he had once done before, but still, they could not explain the interpretation. Furthermore, years of misplaced confidence had caused him to forget the unique greatness of the God who was Daniel’s sovereign, for he attributed his insight to “the spirit of the holy gods” whom he believed to reside within Daniel (4:8-9, 18). The lessons learned in Daniel 2-3 had indeed been forgotten.

Yet through another dream, the God of Judah chose once again to reveal truth to this pagan king and to provide him with a warning of divine judgment. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a great tree that exhibited strength, distinction, beauty, and provision for those that it sheltered. The image of a tree of life is well known to students of the Bible who should recognize it from the early pages of Genesis 2-3 and from the final pages of Revelation 2 and 22. But other Ancient Near Eastern cultures also contained stories and imagery of a great tree of life, imagery which Nebuchadnezzar would have been familiar with. Kings and men were often portrayed symbolically as great trees of one kind or another.<sup>47</sup> Even Proverbs uses the “tree of life” imagery to demonstrate the blessings which the wise and righteous can bring to others.<sup>48</sup>

One of Nebuchadnezzar’s favorite images for himself was that of a shepherd who was given to provide for all the peoples and to preserve all the cities of his land. He saw in himself the choice of the gods through whom they provided for their subjects. In the Wadi Brisa inscription, he spoke of Babylon as a shelter for those under his care, “Under its everlasting shadow, I have gathered all the peoples in peace.”<sup>49</sup> Compare this with his dream where he saw that “its leaves

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<sup>47</sup> See 2 Kgs 14:9; Pss 1:3; 37:35; 52:8; 92:12; Ezek 17; 31; Jer 33:15; Zech 6:12; Cf. Walvoord, *Daniel*, 101-2; E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 97-99.

<sup>48</sup> See Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4.

<sup>49</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 171.

were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it” (Dan 4:12). The king may have already sensed that the tree symbolically represented himself and his fear may have stemmed from a concern that his dream might have personal ramifications.

In his dream, the tree was chopped down and the stump was bound, but in the angelic messenger’s pronouncement of judgment, the object of the divine sentencing is clarified to be a man: Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him (Dan 4:15–16). And indeed, Daniel confirmed the king’s fears, “It is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth” (4:22). Daniel continued, “It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (4:25).

The rulers of this world often find themselves tempted to believe that their sovereignty comes from themselves, from the might of their hand or because of the wisdom of their decrees. They are tempted to believe that their works have provided for the people who are entrusted to their care and that their goodness is what has brought blessings to the sons of men. Likewise, the subjects of their kingdoms also find themselves tempted to worry, to doubt or to forget that the rulers of their generation are under the same providential hand that has raised up kings and brought them down for thousands of years. Even believers can forget in the midst of political chaos and the travails of this world that it is the Most High who rules the kingdom of men. It is he who gives it to whom he wills. He has not lost control and in the end all men will bow before him and we will see that what he has accomplished is good and has brought him glory. In his sovereignty God has orchestrated the events of human history in order

to accomplish his purposes and his plan, even through the reign of pagan kings and rulers who refuse to hear his voice.

God provided to Nebuchadnezzar a promise that his kingdom would be returned to him after he acknowledged the sovereignty of the King of Heaven. Furthermore, this pagan king was granted a final warning from the Most High who, in his grace, sent his servant to offer counsel, “Break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (4:27).

Yet all these things came to pass upon the king of Babylon. The book of Daniel records “At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, ‘Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?’” (Dan 4:29-30). The tenor of the “East India House” tablet harmonizes with the king’s boast.<sup>50</sup> Hear his claims:

More than Babylon and Barsippa I made no city to stand forth in glory. In Babylon, city of the lifting up of my eyes, which I love, the palace, the house for people to behold ... abode of my royal power, in the land of Babylonia....

With mortar and burnt brick I made it high as a mountain. Great cedar beams for its roof I laid.... Silver, gold, and precious stones, whatsoever has a name of value and is beautiful, possessions and treasures, what is worthy of princely power, I heaped up in it.

My lordly dwelling I made magnificent...I built ... I fixed ... I caused ... material from the great mountains I made and like a mountain I raised its top. That temple I made for beholding. For the beholding [of] all men I filled it with costly furnishings.

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<sup>50</sup> The “East India House” tablet does not necessarily come from the exact time as the events which set Nebuchadnezzar’s madness in motion, but the similarities are striking. Langdon has proposed that this tablet was redacted from other inscriptions commissioned by the king and he dates this as the last literary work of Nebuchadnezzar’s inscriptions and of this period (*Building Inscriptions*, 20-21). It is fascinating to note the peculiarity that the “East India House” tablet makes no reference of Nebuchadnezzar’s northern palace. This palace may very well have been the last of his great architectural accomplishments but is only mentioned in one late inscription (19).

Majestic, fearful, and awful things of my royal splendor were scattered throughout it.<sup>51</sup>

Even when Nebuchadnezzar made mention of his own gods and their temples, it is often only to mention how “I adorned them,” how “I built them up,” and how “I made [them] acceptable: for men to behold I filled it with beautiful things.”<sup>52</sup>

### 3. The Manifestation of Divine Sovereignty

Nebuchadnezzar had already encountered the greatness of God and witnessed a manifestation of his *omniscience* when he revealed not only the dream in Daniel 2, but also its interpretation. He had also witnessed a manifestation of the *omnipotence* of this God when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were rescued from the flames of the furnace. But he would once again behold the signs and wonders of the Most High when he witnessed that this God is also *extra tempus*. The sovereign Lord of the universe and Creator of all things not only “knows all things” and is able to “do all things,” but he also exists and rules from “outside of time.” This Sovereign is not bound by the same constraints and limitations that limit human rulers, but “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan 4:32).

God not only foretold the madness of King Nebuchadnezzar, once again demonstrating his omniscient and omnipresent sovereignty, but he also brought it to pass while the boast was still on the lips of the Babylonian king. “Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws” (4:33). The Most High exists outside of time and yet he steps into it and demonstrates his reign by accomplishing his purposes according to his will and at whatever point in time he chooses. Nebuchadnezzar’s madness came about exactly when God decreed it and for the span of time over which God had declared it would happen.

The king’s madness resembled what has become known in the medical profession as boanthropy, a psychological disorder in which

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<sup>51</sup> Langdon, *Building Inscriptions*, 135-9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 125.

one believes himself to actually be on ox or a bovine creature.<sup>53</sup> The “Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh” contains another story resembling the same phenomenon. Matthias Henze has discussed how “each of the elements in the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s life in exile finds an exact counterpart in the descriptions of Enkidu, the wild man, before his metamorphosis into a fully civilized human being.”<sup>54</sup>

Many modern scholars have used a medical diagnosis, parallels between Nebuchadnezzar and the “Epic of Gilgamesh,” or even later accounts of Nabonidus exile to discount the record of Daniel 4. The belief of this writer is that the biblical account, which was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, preserves the record of historical events in the life of one of the most notorious kings of ancient history. Rather than trying to explain away the madness of Nebuchadnezzar, the student of God’s word should find in this chapter an incredible demonstration of the sovereignty of God. More so, the student of God’s word should find, here, an incredible demonstration of the irony which the Most High often uses in his demonstration of that sovereignty.

In Babylonian mythology, the wild man eventually confronts Gilgamesh before the two become friends and the heroes of the story. They soon set out on a journey to cut down a great tree from the Forest of Cedar. But here lays the irony that the sovereign God brought about and that would not have been lost on Nebuchadnezzar or anyone else living in his time. Rather than the hero conquering and cutting down the “great tree,” God provided a dream in which the great tree represented the hero of Nebuchadnezzar’s own story and was then cut down and bound. And rather than the wild man becoming the hero, the hero of his own story devolved from a “fully civilized human being” into the brutish wild man. Nebuchadnezzar saw and had described himself as the great hero of his own time, but God brought about a full reversal of Babylon’s greatest heroic epic.

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<sup>53</sup> Boanthropy is a specific form of zoanthropy, a disorder in which one believes themselves to be an animal. Others have labeled Nebuchadnezzar as being subject to lycanthropy, which specifically refers to those who believe themselves to be a wolf.

<sup>54</sup> Matthias Henze, *The Madness of Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins & Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 97-99.

#### 4. The Response of Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-3, 34-37)

The madness was, in all probability, a very well-kept secret, for when Daniel was called several years later to interpret the writing on the wall, he recounted the humbling of the mighty king to a quaking Belshazzar:

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him.... But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, *though you knew all this*, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven (Dan 5:18-23).

Wherever the king was kept or had wandered off to, Daniel records that Nebuchadnezzar suffered from this mania for seven periods of time (4:16, 25, 34), “till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” The sage does not elaborate on the order or causation of his return to sanity, but the text does indicate that the king was humbled and that in his humility he learned a great lesson about the sovereignty of Daniel’s God. As a result, his majesty and splendor were returned to him with the glory of his kingdom (4:36).

Neither does the text go so far as to declare that Nebuchadnezzar became a worshiper of YHWH or that he renounced the gods of Babylon. Certainly, he did not rebuild the temple of Jerusalem or send the Jewish people home. However, Nebuchadnezzar did bless, praise, and honor the Most High which expresses more than he had ever before. And he told in his own words a few of the lessons that he did learn:

“I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever” (4:34). Man is limited, apart from other

things, by the span of his own lifetime and any life that the Creator gives to him on the other side of the grave, but the Most High is eternal.

“For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation.” His sovereignty is not limited by a predecessor or anyone who would seek to usurp his authority. God’s sovereignty is sustained throughout every era of time.

“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (4:35). His sovereignty extends beyond every created being in heaven and on earth. Their significance is nil and their will is a vapor. But his worth is infinite and his will cannot be hindered in any celestial or terrestrial kingdom.

“None can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’ ” The Most High is unlimited in power and unlimited in wisdom. The kings of the earth may be hindered by their rivals and they may be hamstrung by their own foolish decisions, but this God will never rightfully be second-guessed. His rule is perfect.

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (4:37). God had wreaked great havoc in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar, who could have cried foul. He could have complained of years wasted or riches lost. But he rightly gave praise to the one that he now called the King of heaven, once again attributing a position that his higher than any other. Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar declared God’s works to be right and his ways just. This is a King who deals honestly with his subjects and his judgments are accurate. All of heaven and earth will one day see that everything that God has chosen and accomplished in his sovereignty was right and we will declare that he could not have been more right and wise in what he has brought forth from one end of time to the other.

#### D. The Will of Nebuchadnezzar in the Context of Divine Sovereignty

The final words written by King Nebuchadnezzar were these: Those who walk in pride he is able to humble. The pride of Nebuchadnezzar's heart was finally brought low. He had learned that his will was subject to the works and ways of the sovereign King of heaven.

If the seven times of Nebuchadnezzar's madness were indeed a period of seven years and if these years took place during the final half of the siege of Tyre, as is the hypothesis of this writer, then Nebuchadnezzar's sanity and his kingdom would have been restored to him sometime around the thirty-first year of his reign which would have ended in the spring of 573 BC. The coastal city of Tyre fell later that same year in the thirty-second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

But Nebuchadnezzar's rule would extend for another twelve years into the first days of October 562 BC; and these years are shrouded in silence. Archaeologists have yet to unearth a chronicle detailing the last half of his reign; neither have they found, from the final years of his life, any inscriptions left on cliff walls or tablets that praise his victory in Tyre or any later building accomplishments. Even his campaign in the kingdom of Egypt bears no stelae or cylinder boasting of his victory. Only the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a fragmentary text contain any record of the plunder and wealth that Nebuchadnezzar returned home with after destroying Tahpanhes and Heliopolis in Egypt.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps this lack of historical record is an attestation to the events of Daniel 4 and a more humble king who was not as quick to boast of his own success. The final words written about Nebuchadnezzar in his lifetime were penned by the prophet Ezekiel in April 571. He wrote of Nebuchadnezzar, "I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they [his army] worked for me, declares the Lord God." Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar did remember which God is sovereign. Perhaps this

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<sup>55</sup> See Ezek 29:17-20; Jer 25:19, 26; 43:10-13; 44:29-30; cf. Pritchard, *ANET*, 308. The fragment in the British Museum (BrM 78-10-15, 22, 37, and 38) speaks of Nebuchadnezzar marching against Egypt in his thirty-seventh year.

proud king never forgot the Most High who is able to humble those who walk in pride.

### **Conclusion**

The book of Daniel offers a piercing reminder to believers of all centuries that our God is sovereign. We must remember, even in the midst of a world that has gone mad, that our God reigns as supreme. He is worthy of our trust. He is worthy of our obedience. And as Nebuchadnezzar discovered, he is worthy of our blessing and praise and honor. Christians may be tempted to worry, to doubt, or even to forget altogether that they serve a sovereign God who reigns with supreme authority. But the story of Nebuchadnezzar and his madness reminds us that our God has not lost control, even while we live in a world that has.

These chapters from Daniel also teach us much about living in such a world in light of the sovereignty of our God. We learn from Daniel 1 that the world will not necessarily show regard and respect for our God or for his people. Yet even in the midst of war and political turmoil, the Most High is a sovereign Lord who places his people in situations that allow them to shine and reflect His glory. We must show determination and we must remember which King we serve.

We learn from Daniel 2 that the world will ultimately fail in finding the answers to the problems which bring it trouble. Yet even in the midst of uncertainty and times of confusion, the Most High is a sovereign Lord who knows all things and he has revealed truth to his people. We must show grace and we must declare the message of salvation to a world that is desperate to hear God's word.

We learn from Daniel 3 that the world will persecute the people of God. Yet even in the midst of false worship and a world filled with compromise, the Most High is a sovereign Lord who walks with his people and is able to deliver them from and through the darkest days of our lives. We must show courage and remember that our King is a living God and he will protect us for all eternity.

And we learn from Daniel 4 that the world will seek its own will and the rulers of this world will build their kingdoms by their own might and for their own prosperity. Yet even in the midst of their struggle for power and affluence, the Most High is a sovereign Lord who rules over the kingdom of men. We must show compassion for

those who rule over us as we submit to our leaders, as we pray for our leaders, and even as we give counsel to our leaders. And we must not lose heart as we remember that our God is right and his ways are just.

And with Nebuchadnezzar, may we cry out, “We praise and extol and honor the King of heaven. It is good to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

How great are his signs,  
how mighty his wonders!  
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and his dominion endures from generation to generation.”

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