

SPECIAL STUDY ONE

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S BABYLON

excerpt from

EXILE AND RETURN

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A clay tablet which dates back to Persian times contains a map of the world. Various towns are marked, along with the canals and waterways which made them possible. Around the whole span of the earth's surface is an ocean which has the appearance of a tire on a wheel. Beyond are yet other regions, indicated by triangles which touch the outer rim of the ocean. The geographical center of this universe, however, was the city of Babylon.

Babylon was an ancient city. We are told that Nimrod began his ancient empire there (Gen. 10:10). About 1830 B.C. a dynasty of kings from Babylon began to annex surrounding city-states and the First Dynasty of Babylon began its quest for power. The famed Hammurabi codified Babylonian law (*ca.* 1700 B.C.) and ruled all of southern Mesopotamia, extending his conquests as far as Mari on the middle Euphrates.

The glory of Babylon declined and southern Mesopotamia was ruled for centuries by governors appointed by the Assyrians who ruled from Asshur and Nineveh. When, under Nabopolassar, the Babylonians rebelled against Assyria and, in 612 B.C., helped destroy Nineveh, the center of empire, if not the center of the universe, could be identified with the ancient Babylon.

Our knowledge of ancient Babylon comes from a variety of sources. It is described in the Bible as the capital city of the nation which took Judah into captivity. Daniel and his companions were trained as courtiers in the schools of Babylon. The Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote a century and a half after Nebuchadnezzar, described the city as a vast square, 480 stades ($55\frac{1}{4}$ miles) in circumference, surrounded by a huge moat of running water, beyond which were ramparts two hundred cubits high and fifty cubits

broad! Herodotus tells us that the streets were arranged at right angles, a fact later verified by Koldewey, the excavator of Babylon. The Euphrates was walled on both sides as it made its course through the city, a series of gates providing the inhabitants of Babylon access to the river. Diodorus Siculus and other Greeks spoke in admiration of Babylon, unquestionably the largest and most magnificent city of the ancient world.

The Book of Daniel records the boast of Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" (Dan. 4:30). The words are not without meaning. In addition to the walls which surrounded Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was personally responsible for much that was within the city. He laid out and paved with bricks the great Procession Way which led to the temple of Marduk. The palace of his father Nabopolassar was completely rebuilt. Beams of cedar were imported from distant Lebanon for the project.

Nabopolassar had already begun the rebuilding of Babylon, but it was left to Nebuchadnezzar to pursue the work in earnest. Before the death of Nabopolassar about two-thirds of the work he had planned for the protection of Babylon had been completed. The inner wall of the city, known as *Imgur-Bel*, was finished. He also had built an outer wall, the *Nimitti-Bel*, and reconstructed the city gates with cedar wood covered with strips of bronze. Symbolic guardians of the city were the half-human, half-animal bronze colossi which stood at the threshold.

Nebuchadnezzar took up where his father left off. A third massive wall was built on the east side of the city at a distance of four thousand cubits from the outer wall. Before this was a moat, walled around with bricks. Similar defenses were built on the west, but they were not as strong because the desert formed a natural barrier.

To the north, the direction from which trouble might be expected, Nebuchadnezzar pursued a different plan. Between the two walls, and between the river and the *Ishtar Gate* he constructed an artificial platform of brick laid in bitumen. Upon this elevated platform he built a citadel which was connected with his royal palace. In this way he made the north wall so solid that it could be neither broken down nor breached. The citadel could be used as a

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watch-tower and, if need be, destructive missiles could be shot or thrown from it upon any enemy who might have reached the outside of the walls. Apart from the possibility of treachery within, Babylon appeared impregnable.

The Neo-Babylonian period is well documented, and Nebuchadnezzar has left us accounts of his building operation. In describing his work on the walls he declares:

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the restorer of Esagila and Ezida, son of Nabopolassar am I. As a protection to Esagila, that no powerful enemy and destroyer might take Babylon, that the line of battle might not approach Imgur-Bel, the wall of Babylon, that which no former king had done, I did; at the enclosure of Babylon I made an enclosure of a strong wall on the east side. I dug a moat, I reached the level of the water. I then saw that the wall which my father had prepared was too small in its construction. I built with bitumen and brick a mighty wall which, like a mountain, could not be moved, and connected it with the wall of my father; I laid its foundations on the breast of the underworld; its top I raised up like a mountain. Along this wall to strengthen it I constructed a third, and as the base of a protecting wall I laid a foundation of bricks, and built it on the breast of the under-world, and laid its foundation. The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened, and established the name of my reign forever.

Archaeology has provided us with the tools to evaluate the boasts of Nebuchadnezzar and the reports of Herodotus. In 1898 Robert Koldewey began the excavation of Babylon under the auspices of the *Deutsche Orientgesellschaft*. Work continued for more than eighteen years. Full reports of Koldewey's work appeared in his book, *Das wieder erstehende Babylon*, which contained photographs and plans of the city and its principal structures. The foreword to the first edition was dated, "Babylon, May 16, 1912." A fourth edition appeared in 1925.

Koldewey came upon the walls of Babylon during the early days of his dig. It took considerable time to excavate them, but the results were indeed impressive. Around the ruins of the city was a brick wall 22½ feet thick. Outside this wall was a space 38½ feet wide, then another brick wall, 25 feet thick. If the outer wall were breached the invader would find himself trapped between two walls. Lining the inner side of the citadel moat was still another wall, 12 feet thick. In times of danger the moat could be flooded.

The walls were surmounted every 160 feet by watch-towers. Koldewey suggests that there were 360 such towers on the inner wall (an estimate based upon the pattern of the ruins). Excavations indicate that the towers were 27 feet wide, and they probably were 90 feet high (much less than the 300 feet mentioned by Herodotus). Ancient historians tell us that two chariots could be driven abreast on the road which ran on top of the wall and completely surrounded the city. The walls were constantly patrolled by guards.

There were numerous gates in the walls, although Herodotus' reference to one hundred gates must be dismissed as hyperbole. The most famous entrance into the city was the Ishtar gate which led from the north of the city into the Procession Way. The gate was fifteen feet wide and its vaulted passageway was thirty-five feet above the street level. The bricks were so molded that they form bas-relief figures of bulls and dragons. Their surfaces were overlaid with thickly colored enamels. Nebuchadnezzar used properly fired bricks, and they have remained through the ages. The sun dried bricks used by his predecessors have disintegrated long ago.

The Procession Way was primarily used for the great annual occasion when king and people went to the temple of Marduk at the New Year's Festival. During the forty-three years of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar continued to beautify the Procession Way. He wrote:

Aibur-shabu, the street of Babylon, I filled with a high fill for the procession of the great lord Marduk, and with Turminabanda stones and Shadu stones I make this Aibur-shabu fill for the procession of his godliness, and linked it with those parts which my father had built, and made the way a shining one.

The pavement of the Procession Way was built over a base of bricks covered with bitumen. It consisted of blocks of limestone with sides more than a yard wide, pointed with asphalt. Inscribed on the underside of each of the slabs were the words:

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, son of Nabopolassar, King of Babylon, am I. Of the streets of Babylon for the procession of the great lord Marduk, with slabs of limestone, I built the causeway. Oh, Marduk my lord, grant eternal life.

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Along the walls of the Procession Way was a series of 120 lions in enameled relief. They were spaced at 64 foot intervals and gave a sense of awe to the street. The lions had hides of white or yellow, with manes of yellow or red. They were posed against a background of light or dark blue. The Procession Way was 73½ feet wide.

At the annual New Year's Festival, statues of the principal deities were assembled from all the provinces of the kingdom and solemnly carried through the Ishtar Gate out to the northern outskirts of the city. There they were transferred to boats and taken to the Garden Temple up the river. This was followed by the consummation of the sacred marriage of the principal god and goddess, which was presumed to guarantee the fertility and prosperity of the whole land. On the eleventh day of the month Nisan the procession joyously returned through the Ishtar Gate from the north. Marduk led the procession in his chariot-boat. Behind the chief god of Babylon rode the king in his chariot. Behind the king were carriage-boats containing the images of the other gods worshiped in Babylon.

Along the Procession Way was the famous staged-tower or ziggurat of Babylon known as E-temen-anki—"The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth"—which rose 300 feet into the air and could be seen from a distance by travelers approaching the city. Fifty-eight million bricks are said to have been used in its construction. Like Babylon itself, the ziggurat goes back to remote antiquity. On its top was a Temple to Marduk, the god of Babylon. Enemies of the state—such as Tukulti-Ninurta, Sargon, Sennacherib, and Ashurbanipal—devastated the city and destroyed the Marduk shrine. The tower was rebuilt by the Neo-Babylonian rulers Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar. In a sense it pictured both the glories of Marduk, and of Marduk's city, Babylon. Nabopolassar declared:

The lord Marduk commanded me concerning E-temen-anki, the staged tower of Babylon, which before my time had become dilapidated and ruinous, that I should make its foundations secure in the bosom of the nether world, and make its summit like the heavens.

The ziggurat consisted of seven terraces, on the top of which was a temple made of bricks enameled bright blue to

represent the heavens. The temple was approached by a triple staircase, at the middle of which there was a place where the visitor might rest. Within the temple was a couch and a golden table. This was regarded as the abode of Marduk. No one except a priestess, who served as the consort of the god, was to enter this shrine. The prosperity of the land was thought to depend upon this sacred marriage ritual.

Across the street from the ziggurat was the temple area known as E-sag-ila ("The house which lifts up the head"). Herodotus visited the E-sag-ila and was much impressed by its golden figure of "Zeus" (Babylonian Bel-Marduk) seated in the shrine beside a golden table. According to the statistics which Herodotus gives (which may be exaggerated) the gold of these objects weighed about 890 talents, or 4800 pounds with a current value of \$24,000,000. "Zeus" appeared as a half-animal, half-human creature. Outside the sanctuary were a number of other altars and statues including a standing figure of Marduk, twelve cubits (twenty feet) high, of solid gold. The complex of buildings occupied sixty acres, bounded on the west by the Euphrates and on the east by the Procession Way. Towering 470 feet above the ground was the shrine known as the E-kur ("Temple mountain") built on a terrace of asphalted bricks like the nearby ziggurat.

The total number of shrines in ancient Babylon, as recorded in contemporary inscriptions, appears incredible. We read that,

There are altogether in Babylon fifty-three temples of the great gods, fifty-five shrines dedicated to Marduk, three hundred shrines belonging to earth divinities, six hundred shrines for celestial divinities, one hundred and eighty altars to the goddess Ishtar, one hundred and eighty to the gods Nergal and Adad, and twelve other altars to various deities.

North of the ziggurat was a mound called Kasr on which Nebuchadnezzar built the most imposing of his palaces. The palace walls were of finely made yellow brick, and floors were of white and mottled sandstone. The palace was adorned with reliefs in blue glaze. Its gates were guarded by gigantic basalt lions.

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Near the palace were the famed Hanging Gardens, considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Nebuchadnezzar built the gardens for his wife who missed the hills of her Median homeland. The gardens appear to have been terraced and set on a small hill beside the palace, flanked by the Procession Way and the Ishtar Gate.

Josephus quotes from Berossus, *History of Chaldea*, an account of the building of Nebuchadnezzar's palace and the hanging gardens,

In this palace he erected retaining walls of stone to which he gave an appearance very like that of mountains and, by planting on them trees of all kinds, he achieved this effect and built the so-called hanging garden because his wife, who had been brought up in the region of Media, had a desire for her native environment.

The gardens were irrigated by means of an endless chain of buckets which raised water to the highest point of the terrace. The gardens were impressive when viewed from a distance from the city. The visitor to Babylon could see the tops of the trees towering above the city walls.

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was an excellent example of early city planning. The city was divided into a number of rectangles by wide roads which were named after the gods of the Babylonian pantheon. On the left bank of the Euphrates we find the streets of Marduk and Zababa intersecting at right angles with the streets of Sin and Enlil. On the right bank we find an intersection of the streets of Adad and Shamash. Except for the famed Procession Way, Babylon's streets were not paved.

A bridge connecting the eastern or New City with the western city of Babylon had stone piers and a timber foot path which could be withdrawn in times of emergency. Permanent bridges were rare in the ancient East, and the one across the Euphrates was a source of wonder to travelers.

The business life of the city centered in the wharves which flanked the Euphrates. Business offices were located along the river bank. The market sector of ancient Babylon has not been identified, but it was probably located in the *Merkes* quarter.

DANIEL

The houses of the city were frequently three or four stories high, being built according to a pattern which has been familiar in the East from ancient times to the present. Each home would be built around a central courtyard. There would be no windows facing the street, but all light would come through the courtyard. Access to the rooms of the second story was by a wooden balcony which extended around the entire inner courtyard. A narrow door in one of the first floor rooms opened into the street.

Ancient Babylon required a system of canals if the best use was to be made of the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Hammurabi, the famed king of the Old Babylonian Empire had been a canal builder, and his successors needed to be careful to insure proper irrigation of the fields. When Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne of Babylon, its eastern canal had so deteriorated that there were places where its channel could not be traced. Nebuchadnezzar had it redug, and then walled up from the bottom. Because the canal passed through Babylon, it was necessary to build a bridge across it.

Although most of his energy was spent on Babylon itself, Nebuchadnezzar did not completely neglect the other cities of Mesopotamia. He rebuilt the walls of Borsippa and restored the temples of the city to a good state of repair.

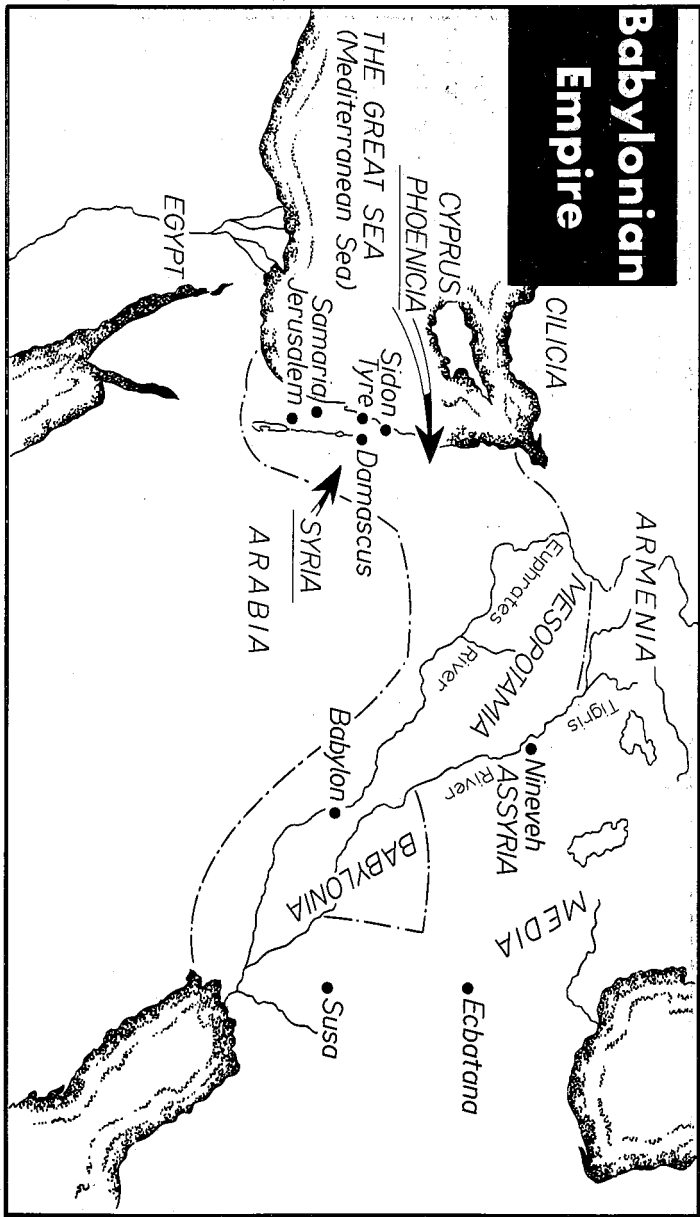
Nebuchadnezzar was an able and an energetic sovereign. He was in all respects the most able as well as the most ambitious ruler of his day. In him the Neo-Babylonian Empire reached its zenith. Great as were his accomplishments both on the field of battle and in building the cities of his kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar left an empire that had no political stability. His own personality held it together, and when that was gone it was not long before his dynasty came to an end.

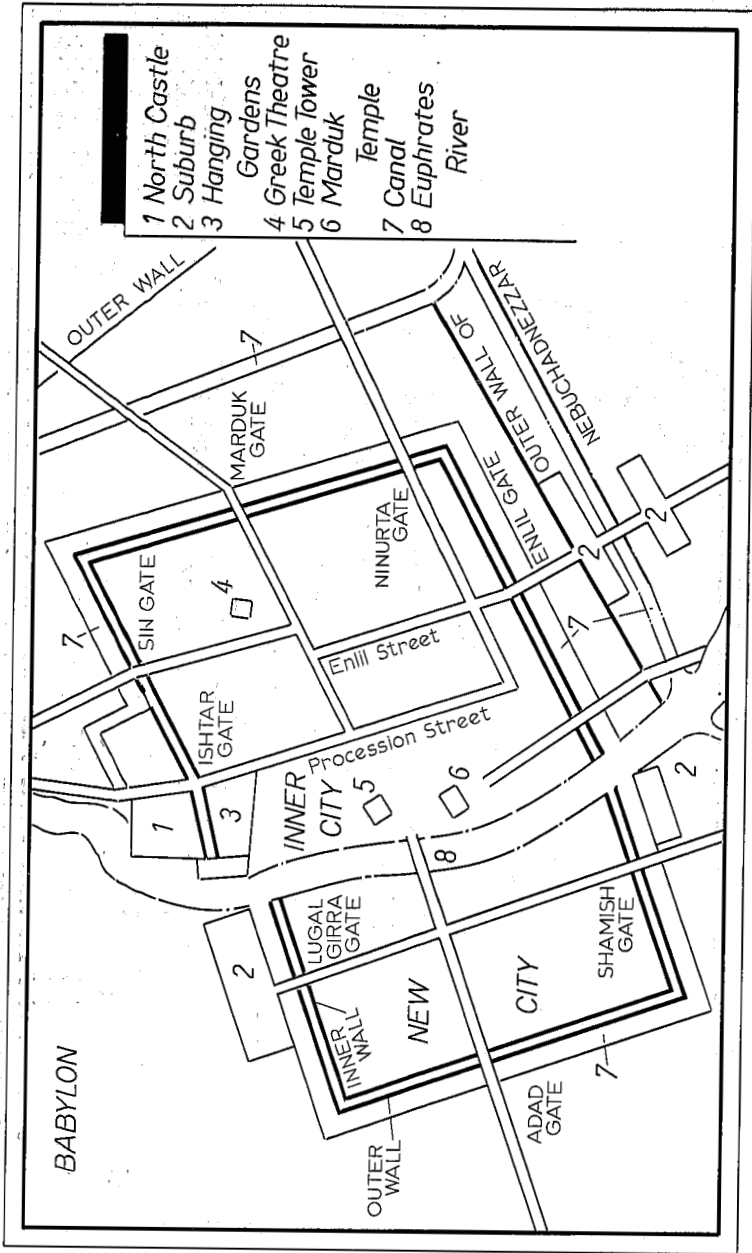
EXILIC TIMES

| | JUDAH | BABYLON | MEDIO-PERSIA | EGYPT |
|-----|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| 639 | Josiah | | | |
| 626 | | Nabopolassar | | |
| 609 | Jehoahaz Jehoiakim Jeremiah | | | Necho |
| 605 | | Nebuchadnezzar | | |
| 597 | Jehoiachin Zedekiah Ezekiel | | | Psammetichus |
| 594 | Daniel | | | |
| 588 | | | | Apries |
| 586 | Jerusalem destroyed | | | |
| 568 | | | | Amasis |
| 562 | | Awel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach) | | |
| 560 | | Neriglissar (Nergal-sharezer) | | |
| 559 | | | Cyrus | |
| 556 | | Nabonidus and Belshazzar | | |
| 539 | Edict— return of the Jews | Fall of Babylon | | |
| 530 | | | Cambyses | |
| 522 | Zerubbabel Haggai, Zechariah | | Darius | |
| 515 | Temple completed | | | |
| 485 | | | Xerxes | |
| 479 | | | (Esther) | |
| 464 | | | Artaxerxes I | |
| 457 | Ezra | | | |
| 444 | Nehemiah | | | |
| 423 | | | Darius II | |
| 404 | | | Artaxerxes II | |

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Babylonian Empire







CAMEO OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR NOW IN THE MUSEUM
AT FLORENCE