



NIMROD AND THE RISE OF BABYLON

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MAJDALI: Nimrod & the Rise of Babylon

Even after many centuries of sleeping in the Iraqi dust, the very mention of its name evokes awe, respect, ... and even a tinge of fear. A place where some of antiquity's greatest achievements and vilest deeds were wrapped within her mighty walls. Every Bible student should be familiar with this city for it is mentioned 286 times from Genesis to Revelation. That place, of course, is known to the world as '*Babylon.*'

FATHER OF BABYLON

To understand the importance of Babylon, we need to meet her founder, Nimrod. Though mentioned only four times in scripture, his historical and spiritual influence would be incalculable.

Nimrod's notorious career begins with his pedigree. The Bible says he is the son of Cush, thus making him the grandson of Ham. And his grandfather's lascivious character brought down a curse on his descendants. Not a very promising start. And there is more. The meaning of his name comes from the Hebrew word '*MARAD*' which means '*to rebel*' or '*we will rebel.*' Nimrod's ancestry and name give us a foretaste of what is to come. He is known to us as:

THE MIGHTY HUNTER

Nimrod's climb to power began by demonstrating his dominion over the animal kingdom. The Bible calls him '*a mighty hunter before the Lord*' (Gen 10:9). His skilful use of weaponry reduced the most massive mammals into harmless carcasses, proving he could protect people from the wild beasts. But in time an intoxicating lust for power caused Nimrod to turn his hunting energies from animals to people, and he relentlessly sought to eliminate all who would not co-operate with his plans for personal greatness.

THE MIGHTY RULER

Nimrod lived in a country that is known to us today as modern Iraq. The scriptural names for this land are '*Shinar*' and '*Mesopotamia,*' the latter being the ancient Greek word for '*the land between the (two) rivers.*' Here is where the Garden of Eden was located. And Mesopotamia provided the stage where from Nimrod became a mighty ruler.

Using his vaunted hunting skills, Nimrod rallied people to live in fenced cities under one banner...his banner! There they would find safety and fellowship. But the '*Land of Nimrod*' was no democracy and anyone who did not agree with his personal empire-building program was hunted like an animal and destroyed. Thus Nimrod became the world's first dictator and despot.

Through his tireless and tyrannical efforts, Nimrod laid the foundation of a monarchy that would become Daniel's '*head of gold.*' And from the soil of ancient Iraq would emanate five of the greatest empires the world has ever known:

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1. The Sumerian Empire;
2. First Babylonian (19th Century B.C. --Hammurabi being its most famous ruler);
3. The Assyrian Empire (Eighth Century B.C.--Jonah visited their capital, Nineveh);
4. The Second Babylonian Empire (Sixth Century B.C.--Nebuchadnezzar); and
5. The Abbasid (Islamic) Empire (A.D. 750-1258).

THE GREAT BUILDER

'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves...' Genesis 11:4

History's great rulers often consolidated their military victories with extensive building programs. They, no doubt, took their cue from Nimrod. For once he had herded mankind into his fenced areas, he began to embark on a monumental building project. His most famous is found in Genesis 11.

Using the famous Babylonian-baked brick and slime (bitumen), the Nimrodites began to build a great tower by the banks of the Euphrates River. This tower did not offer the normal fabulous observation points and sumptuous revolving restaurants on the top, as we have today. Its purpose was to lay the cornerstone of false religion by openly rebelling

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Nimrod's contribution to the world order far outstrips his brief mention in scripture. We are still feeling the ripples today of the splash he made in humanity's pool. Most significantly, he is the founding father of false religion.

As a rebel and egomaniac, Nimrod could not bring himself to submit to the living God. Likewise, he taught his captive subjects that they did not need God for their protection and happiness, either. These commodities could be found through Nimrod alone. Spiritual regeneration need only come from human means, while men could enjoy sensual pleasure and sin for a season without fearing the wrath of God. .

Nimrod, however, became confronted with his own mortality when he became violently and fatally injured. His distraught wife, Semiramis, fearing that their plans for greatness were doomed, came upon a plan. Her scheme would actually enable Nimrod to receive far more power in death than he ever enjoyed in life. It would be announced that her deceased husband had become 'god' and rose from the dead. Nimrod no longer wanted mere earthly obedience. He demanded worship!

This is the gospel according to Babylon. And from the plains of Shinar, the news of this 'god-man,' the 'risen' Nimrod spread in various forms and under different labels throughout the world.

Thus paganism was born! And future 'princes of Babylon,' would follow the same pattern: building a great empire first and then declaring their divinity. Nebuchadnezzar did, and so will Antichrist.

THE GATE OF GOD

Nimrod called his tower in Genesis 11 'Bab' illi,' which means 'Gate of God.' But the ancient Hebrews called it 'Babel,' which means confusion. Any way that does not conform to the knowledge of the true God, no matter how systematised, educated, or religious, is bound to lead to confusion. Jacob, however, discovered in the wilderness of Bethel that saying yes to the Lord's will is no other than *'the house of God and the gate of heaven.'* Genesis 28:17

INTRODUCING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

It would be centuries later that a "neo-Nimrod" would turn this fabled city and birthplace of paganism into the greatest city the ancient world had ever seen. Not only did he make a great impression on secular history, but the Bible also mentions him 91 times by name. He is known to the world as Nebuchadnezzar and his 43 year reign from 605 to 562 B.C. would send ripples that are still being felt to this day.

What makes Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Second Babylonian Empire, so important?

NEBUCHADNEZZAR AS BUILDER OF BABYLON THE GREAT

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By all accounts Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was a truly awesome city. The Greek historian Herodotus, archaeological excavations, monuments, royal inscriptions, and letters confirm its mammoth proportions.

Imagine a city with two sets of walls, the outer which measure 22 kilometers long by 22 kilometers wide, 100 meters high, 10 meters below the ground, and 30 meters thick! The tops of the walls were wide enough to race 2 chariots abreast. This outer wall was pierced by 100 brazen gates, the most famous being the Ishtar Gate, covered with baked blue enamel tiles and striking reliefs of dragons and bulls. You can see the original gate at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

After entering the city via the Ishtar Gate, you would immediately see two world-famous sites. On one side would be the famous "Hanging Gardens of Babylon," one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Nebuchadnezzar reportedly constructed these terraced gardens for his Median queen because she missed the "mountainous" terrain of her native land (Babylonia is notoriously flat and hard to defend). On the other side was a ziggurat, or spiral tower, which probably resembled the original "Tower of Babel" in Nimrod's day.

As you proceed to the city centre on the 20 meter wide Processional Way, you would head towards Nebuchadnezzar's palace. This massive building comprised 54,000 sq feet, 5 courtyards, surrounded by offices and royal apartments. And like his forefather Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar was fastidious about his personal security. His palace was ringed by 3 walls, the outer wall being 11 kilometers in circumference!

Babylon, being a very religious and superstitious city, served as home for over 1,000 temples of various sizes. The most important belonged to their patron god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar himself was reported to have said *"Silver, gold, costly precious stones, bronze, wood from magan, everything that is expensive, glittering abundance, the product of the mountains, the treasures of the seas, large quantities (of goods), sumptuous gifts, I brought to my city of Babylon before him (Marduk)."* The Temple of Marduk contained a golden image of the god, a golden table, and other furnishing that weighed over 3 tons. No wonder Isaiah cried out *"How hath the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased!"* (14:4). (NOTE: The archaeological excavations of German Professor Koldewey from 1899-1917 had to dig through 20 meters of sand and dirt to reach the main sanctuary. But alas, someone from antiquity got the gold!)

In the light of Babylon's magnificent proportions, Nebuchadnezzar could almost be forgiven for his boastful attitude. In Daniel 4:30, when he bellowed *"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built..."* The city was not just a monument for his god Marduk, but also for himself.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, CONQUEROR OF JERUSALEM

From the biblical point of view, Nebuchadnezzar's "tearing down" of Jerusalem was far more significant than his "building up" of Babylon. He actually invaded the city three times before finally destroying it.

The first invasion was shortly after he came to power in 605 B.C. We read in 2 Kings 24:1 *"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him."* It was after this invasion that Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his three friends captive to Babylon.

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In 598 B.C. Judah rebelled, thus triggering the second invasion. 2 Kings 24:2 says *"And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets."* Nebuchadnezzar would have inflicted a savage reprisal on the city had it not been for the fact that Judah's king Jehoiakim died suddenly (possibly assassinated) and the city surrendered quietly.

The third time, however, Jerusalem did not survive. The prophet Jeremiah failed to convince king Zedekiah and Jerusalem to surrender peacefully and the consequences were catastrophic. By the 9th of Av, 586 B.C. the city walls were breached, the houses destroyed, the 400-year-old Temple of Solomon burnt, the ark of God disappeared, the Temple treasures plundered, and the majority of Judeans taken captive to Babylon.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR ENCOUNTERS THE LIVING GOD

Theologically speaking, it would appear that the defeat and destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. also demonstrated the supremacy Babylon's Marduk over Jerusalem's Jehovah. But such a view proved to be short-sighted, flawed, and downright false. For the God of the Bible not only predicted Jerusalem's fall but the time and certainty of her restoration. He also said the great, impregnable city of Babylon would be destroyed in one day and hour, never to rise again. Less than 50 years after Jerusalem's destruction, Babylon fell to Cyrus the Great of Persia (without firing a shot). And even Babylon's builder had an unexpected appointment with the God of Israel.

Daniel 2 tells us about Nebuchadnezzar's forgotten dream of the great statue that stood tall and imposing, only to crumble into countless pieces and be blown away. Yes, God said, you are the "head of gold" seen in that dream. But like the statue, your kingdom is only temporary and will come to an abrupt and violent end. Here Nebuchadnezzar declares the Lord to be *"A God of Gods, and a Lord of kings"* (2:47).

Like his predecessor Nimrod and successor Antichrist, Nebuchadnezzar decided to "declare himself as god" and demand worship by the erection of an image. Daniel 3 tells us this image of gold was 90 feet high, 9 feet wide, and stood at the plain of Dura. Those who would not worship the image were to be executed by being thrown into the fiery furnace. Yet it was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three young Jewish men from the despised destroyed city of Jerusalem, who proved yet again that their God who was greater than Marduk by rescuing them from the furnace. Even Nebuchadnezzar admitted, *"there is no other god that can deliver after this sort."* (3:29)

Though Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the living God, he still did not obey him. This led to the final encounter in Daniel 4. While bragging about the greatness of Babylon, the Lord smote him with temporary insanity, which caused him to literally act like an animal. This condition, which lasted several years, only ceased when Nebuchadnezzar finally woke up and declared *"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase"* (4:37). Which only goes to show that the greatest act of "insanity" is to disobey and deny God; while the greatest act of sanity and wisdom is to acknowledge and

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bless God who *"lives for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation"* (4:34).

BABYLON IN BIBLE PROPHECY

Babylon has received massive attention during her long history from two opposite sources: the world and the Bible. When the world described the "city of Babylon," the Bible described the "prince of Babylon." While the world adulated, the Bible castigated. Whereas the world sought to elevate Babylon to the heavens, the Bible has succeeded in casting her to Hades. If ever a place symbolized the greatest and vilest the world had to offer, it was Babylon. No wonder the Bible gives her an inordinate amount of attention.

While Nebuchadnezzar schemed at obtaining eternal permanence for himself and his city, the Hebrew prophets spoke in great detail about the demise of this awesome city. Daniel said that the "Head of Gold" would be struck by a stone at its base, shatter into dust, and be carried away by the wind. In addition, there are no less than seven whole chapters in the Bible that describe the fall of Babylon. Five of them are in the Old Testament: Isaiah 13, 14, 47, Jeremiah 50, and 51. Two are in the New Testament: Revelation 17, 18.

Some of these prophecies are quite chilling. Here is a brief synopsis of Babylon's destruction, which will be:

- a) By a confederacy of nations coming against her (Isaiah 13:3);
- b) Called the "Day of the Lord," where neither sun, moon, nor stars will shine (Isaiah 13:9,10);
- c) "In a moment, in a day" (Is 47:9);
- d) Likened to when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, both quick and permanent desolation (Is 13:19);
- e) She will never be inhabited again (Is 13:20);
- f) After God's people had fled from her in accordance with God's Word (Jer 51:6).

BABYLON AND HISTORY

The big question is: were these prophecies ever fulfilled literally and historically? For years we assumed and been taught that they had been, because Babylon has long been buried under the Mesopotamian soil. But economic and military rise of the long-dormant nation of Iraq, culminating with the Gulf Crisis of 1990, has caused Bible students to take a fresh look at the "land between the rivers."

What exactly happened to Babylon after the death of her favorite son, Nebuchadnezzar, in 562 B.C.? She was governed by his less-than-competent successors, until the night in 539 B.C. when Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall. On this fateful evening the Persians arrived at the gates of the city and took it. And Great Babylon, which was built to last (and rebel) forever, surrendered immediately without a shot being fired.

So was the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. the fulfillment of Isaiah and Jeremiah's prophecies? History tells us that Cyrus conquered but did not destroy Babylon. The city gave him an ecstatic hero's welcome on his arrival and he, in return, honored it. His conquest was certainly not "the day of the Lord" when the heavenly elements grow dim.

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God's people, like Daniel, Esther, and Ezekiel, did not choose to flee from Babylonia. Either they were living in disobedience to God's Word, or they perceived that the fulfillment of prophecy was for a later time. Two centuries later the Greek historian Herodotus allegedly visited the city and wrote for the world about the splendor of Nebuchadnezzar's city. A few decades afterward Alexander the Great came and decided to make Babylon his eastern capital. He died there in 333 B.C.

There was never any quick "Sodom and Gomorrah" death of Babylon in "in a moment, in a day." In fact, nobody really knows when Babylon "died" and the last spade on dirt was heaped on her corpse. The city apparently still existed in the New Testament times (I Peter 5:13) and the Jews compiled their Babylonian Talmud there around 500 A.D. Perhaps between this date and the arrival of the Muslim Arab armies in 640 A.D. is when Babylon finally "gave up the ghost." Or, could we say, that she merely went into hibernation.

BABYLON TODAY

The science of archaeology has helped give us a greater knowledge of the world and ways of the Bible than what was known 100, 1,000 or even 1,600 years ago. And in Mesopotamia they have found a veritable treasure chest of antiquity. There are over half a million archaeological sites. Of these, only 25,000 have been properly identified and 2,500 have been excavated. One of these sites has been Babylon. From 1899-1917 a German named Prof. Koldeway conducted extensive excavations of Old Babylon revealed a remarkable confirmation of the grandiose descriptions of Herodotus and others. Koldeway uncovered part of the massive wall, the entire Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way, Nebuchadnezzar's Palace, and Marduk's Temple (minus the 3 tons of gold). His findings were written on black and white, rolled up, and stored on a lonely shelf. And the remains of Babylon continued to languish.

So what has become of the city that Isaiah predicted would "*never be inhabited again...neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there* (13:20)." Nearby is the major "Arab" city of Hillah with over 300,000 inhabitants. Koldeway mentioned 4 villages located right on the site of Old Babylon. And there were plenty of nomadic shepherds nearby. Finally, if you check the international calling codes in the front of your white pages, you will discover the area code 1 for Babylon. A few years ago it would not have been there. What is happening?

One of the lesser known, but no less significant, actions of Iraq's Saddam Hussein has been the resurrection of the Nebuchadnezzar's legacy and the rebuilding of ancient Babylon. Professor Koldeway's drawing were taken off the shelf and converted into the blueprints of a brand-new Babylon. The Aramco World Magazine reported in 1989 that "work focused first on the Processional Way and the Ishtar Gate, the Temples of Ishtar, Nabushakhari and Ninmakh...(and) 5,000 square meter (54,000 square foot) Palace of Nebuchadnezzar II was restored." The WORLD PRESS REVIEW in February 1990 stated that "*...thousands of workers are reconstructing the ancient city of Babylon in the middle of the Iraqi desert...every six feet along the walls there is an inscription stamped in Arabic,*

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'The Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar is reconstructed in the era of Saddam Hussein.' Like in Bible times, the Middle East is once again the focus of world attention.

If the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. fulfilled the detailed prophecies of her permanent fall, then why does the New Testament book of Revelation say "*Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird (18:2)*" for "*in one hour is she made desolate*" (18:19). For just a Jerusalem has ascended from obscurity to be the focal point of worldwide attention, so her ancient rival has also shaken off the dust to command the international spotlight. Bible days are here again!

While it is unwise to be dogmatic, the evidence points to the fact that we have not seen the last of Babylon or the "prince of Babylon," a synonym for "antichrist." He will seek to conquer the world and then demand universal worship as god.

For this very reason we would do well to heed the words of the Apostle Paul "*But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 5:8,9)*."