

Nebuchadnezzar Biography

Nebuchadnezzar

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Biography

Nebuchadnezzar (630-562 B.C.) was a king of Babylon during whose long and eventful reign the Neo-Babylonian Empire attained its peak and the city of Babylon its greatest glory.

Nebuchadnezzar--more properly Nebuchadrezzar--is the biblical form of the name Nabu-kudur-utsur (Nabu has set the boundary). He was the son of Nabopolassar, a Chaldean chief who in 626 B.C. led a revolt against Assyrian rule, proclaimed himself king of Babylon, and, in alliance with the Medes and Scythians, succeeded in overthrowing the vast Assyrian Empire and destroying Nineveh in 612 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, as crown prince, was given command of the Babylonian army harrying the remainder of the Assyrians in northern Syria. Early in 605 B.C. he met Necho, the king of Egypt, in battle and defeated him at Carchemish. A few months later Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar hastened home to claim his throne. He soon returned to the west in order to secure the loyalty of Syria and Palestine and to collect tribute; among those who submitted were the rulers of Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, and Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar's Conquests

In 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar attempted the invasion of Egypt but was repulsed with heavy losses. Judah rebelled, but Jerusalem fell in March 597 B.C., and the ruler, Jehoiakim, and his court were deported to Babylon. Eight years later another Jewish rebellion broke out; this time Jerusalem was razed and the population carried into captivity. Expeditions against the Arabs in 582 B.C. and another attempt at invading Egypt in 568 B.C. receive brief mention in Nebuchadnezzar's later records.

Nebuchadnezzar built temples in many of the cities of his kingdom, but the main achievement of his reign was the rebuilding of Babylon, on a scale and with a magnificence never before envisaged. The city covered some 500 acres and was protected by massive double fortifications. The Euphrates River, which bisected it, was spanned by a bridge. In the great palace, built to replace Nabopolassar's, he created the terraced cloister known to the Greeks as the Hanging Gardens and reckoned among the Seven Wonders of the World. It was said that he built it to please his mountain-born wife, Amytis, daughter of Cyaxares, the Median king.

The last years of Nebuchadnezzar's life were clouded by family strife, and he left no strong successor: his son was overthrown by a usurper after reigning only 2 years. Babylon, however, survived and was seen by the Greek historian Herodotus, who described its marvels.