

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR, GILGAMESH, AND THE "BABYLONIAN JOB"

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Nebuchadnezzar stood on his palace roof, which had been made of cedar from the forests of Lebanon. Stacked all around were over fifteen million bricks, each containing his name and royal titles. He was surrounded by six walls and a 262-foot moat.<sup>1</sup> Some of the buildings seemed to rival the heavens. The "contented one"<sup>2</sup> swelled with pride and cried out, "Is not this Babylon, which I have built?" (Dan 4:30).

He had forgotten that all the bricks were made of mud. He had also forgotten the affirmation made at his accession that all he possessed came from one deity.<sup>3</sup> He had not remembered that his father had represented himself on a monument as the "son of nobody," helpless without his god.<sup>4</sup> He had failed to notice two streets below him called "Bow Down, Proud One" and "May the Arrogant Not Flourish." He did not even recall that one of the names of his palace was "The Place Where Proud Ones Are Compelled to Submit."<sup>5</sup>

### I. THE KING'S MADNESS: FACT OR FOLKLORE?

As soon as the king uttered his boast he lapsed into a strange kind of mental illness that would last until seven periods of time passed (4:25, 32). Those who proceed with the assumption that there are no supernatural elements in the narrative have always been quick to brush aside the possibility of reality in this incident. Louis Hartman confidently states that "enough is known of Nebuchadnezzar's forty-three year reign so that it is impossible to fit in such a period of insanity."<sup>6</sup>

It has apparently escaped the attention of many expositors that there are no definite time markers associated with the king's illness.<sup>7</sup> The only

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<sup>1</sup> D J Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (Oxford Oxford University, 1985) 51-71, M Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* (New York Facts on File, 1990) 199

<sup>2</sup> S Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* (Paris Leroux, 1905) 83

<sup>3</sup> S Mercer, *Assyrian Grammar* (New York AMS, 1966) 78-79

<sup>4</sup> S Langdon, *Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (*Vorderasiatische Bibliothek* 4, Leipzig Hinrichs, 1912) 67-68, lines 4, 19

<sup>5</sup> Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar* 47, 63

<sup>6</sup> L Hartman and A Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (Garden City Doubleday, 1978) 178

<sup>7</sup> Daniel 4 13 (Aramaic) uses the indefinite word *iddān*, which may refer to a month rather than a year, cf J Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas Word, 1989) 81

specific period of time mentioned in the entire chapter is the word for "month" in 4:29. Interestingly the literal Aramaic wording for the termination point of the king's malady is "at the end of the days." Though it is certainly proper to render these words "at the end of this time," even seven days of such a harrowing experience would probably suffice to bring about serious attitude adjustments in most of us. Hence it does not appear to be necessary to assume that the king's mental lapse lasted for a period of seven years.

James Montgomery sagaciously notes that since royal families do not usually make such frailties public, records of the king's condition were probably never made.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless there are certain facts that suggest that something was amiss in the latter part of the king's reign.

Meticulous historical records are available up to about the eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, after which the chronicles are practically silent.<sup>9</sup> In 1912 Stephen Langdon published fifty-two building inscriptions belonging to Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>10</sup> Langdon assigns only about four of them to the latter half of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He notes that this part of the king's reign is "remarkably poor in its number of literary productions."<sup>11</sup>

Not only does the number of inscriptions suddenly drop, but also their content radically changes. Earlier preoccupation with religion wanes, and attention is turned to palaces and politics. 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. Langdon notes that after the year 590 BC "we have scarcely anything but palace inscriptions with little to say about the religious interests of the king."<sup>12</sup> This would certainly agree with the king's attitude portrayed in Dan 4:29.

In 1975 A. K. Grayson published a most intriguing fragment of a tablet.<sup>13</sup> D. J. Wiseman identifies Nebuchadnezzar II as the subject of the brief narration.<sup>14</sup> For some unspecified reason the king becomes extremely disoriented. His orders are contradictory, and he does not even heed the mention of his name. He does not show concern for son or daughter and ceases

<sup>8</sup> J. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926) 220-221.

<sup>9</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956) 72. Berger only finds three inscriptions specifically dated from the 7th, 12th and 37th years, P. Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973) 108.

<sup>10</sup> Langdon devotes about 140 pages to the Babylonian and English texts of these inscriptions. They are cited from his 1912 edition unless otherwise indicated. Langdon, *Königsinschriften* 61-209, 299. Berger mentions various works not referred to by Langdon. Berger, *Königsinschriften* 1-125.

<sup>11</sup> Langdon, *Building* 1-17, 22, *Königsinschriften* 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Langdon, *Building* 17-33, *Königsinschriften* 12, 25.

<sup>13</sup> A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975) 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> Grayson holds that the subject changes after Nebuchadnezzar is introduced. Wiseman, however, is probably correct in seeing Nebuchadnezzar rather than Amel-Marduk as the subject. Inscriptions of Neriglissar and Nabonidus do not mention any son or daughter of Amel-Marduk. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar* 102-103.

his care for worship centers. Even his own life is of no value to him. The text ends with the king going to the holy gate and weeping bitterly to the great gods. The text is much too small and fragmentary to dogmatically assert that it is the Babylonian version of the account in Daniel 4. It does, however, indicate that a great deal of caution is in order before dismissing the account of the king's madness as nothing more than folklore.

## II. BABYLON AND THE WORLD TREE

Information available from this period indicates that the description of the world tree in the king's dream (4:10-12, 20-23) is congruous with the image he had of himself and of his kingdom. The tree was "in the midst of the earth." The belief that Babylon was the center of the world represented a long tradition. A quarter of a millennium before Nebuchadnezzar an ancient treatise on the topography of Babylon identified the city as the "link of heaven and the underworld." A. R. George sees this as attributing to the city a position at the middle point of the cosmos.<sup>15</sup>

The only known Mesopotamian map of the world probably dates from just a few generations before Nebuchadnezzar. It depicts Babylon as a large rectangle located near the center of the earth. All the other kingdoms are small circles that revolve around it.<sup>16</sup> The entire earth is drawn as a large circle with four to eight triangles radiating around it. These points (*nagû*) represented distant, remote regions of the earth. The *nagû* may be equated with the "ends of the earth."<sup>17</sup>

In the dream the tree was seen from the end of the earth (4:11). In v. 22 Daniel compares this to the fact that the king's dominion reached to the end of the earth. In his building inscriptions Nebuchadnezzar describes his kingdom as encompassing "all the lands, the entire inhabited world . . . , kings of far-off mountains and remote *nagû*."<sup>18</sup>

The dream goes on to state that in this tree was food for all living creatures and that the beasts of the field found shade under it. In his Inscription Number 9 the king sees his vast empire as a tree that shades and nourishes all peoples. He says, "The produce of the lands, the product of mountains, the wealth of the sea I received in her. Under her everlasting shadow I gathered all men in peace. Vast heaps of grain beyond measure I stored up within her."<sup>19</sup> Interestingly the ancient geographical treatise on the topography of Babylon calls it the city that "ensures the life of the land."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> A. R. George, "The Cuneiform Text Tîn tîrkî Babilu and the Topography of Babylon," *Sumer* 35 (1979) 231

<sup>16</sup> W. Horowitz, "The Babylonian Map of the World," *Iraq* 50 (1988) 153-154, *Genesis X and Babylonian Geography* (VTSup 41, Leiden Brill, 1990) 40-41 Cf also Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (forthcoming)

<sup>17</sup> The *nagû* may not be the ends of the earth but simply very remote regions, Horowitz, "Babylonian Map" 156-163

<sup>18</sup> Langdon, *Königsinschriften* 146, II 17-33, III 2-7, 206, line 17

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 95, lines 18-26, 173, lines 26-37

<sup>20</sup> George, "Cuneiform" 231

The tree's height reached to the heavens (v. 11). The king's father Nabopolassar leaves an inscription about the restoration of Etemenanki ("The House of the Foundation of the Heavens and the Earth"). He claims that he and his sons made its summit in Babylon "rival or equal to the heavens."<sup>21</sup> He continually makes the claim that he built the palace and city from the abyss to the mountaintops.<sup>22</sup>

In the ancient world the king and his kingdom were inseparable. An impressive array of data from the Mesopotamian world identifies the king as a tree. For example, a Sumerian royal hymn addressing the king says, "O chosen cedar . . . , for thy shadow the country may feel awe."<sup>23</sup>

### III. NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND HIS PALACE

In Dan 4:4 the king says he was "happy and flourishing" in his palace. In Inscription Number 9 Nebuchadnezzar says,

The palace, the seat of my royal authority, a place of union of mighty peoples, abode of joy and happiness, the place where proud ones are compelled to submit, I rebuilt upon the bosom of the wide world. . . . My royal decisions, my imperial commands, I caused to go forth from it.<sup>24</sup>

The king proudly asserted that he made his palace to be gazed at in astonishment by everyone. It was "bursting with splendor. Luxuriance, dreadfulness, awe, gleaming majesty surrounded it."<sup>25</sup> He boasted that he made Babylon into a fortress, strong like a mountain. He says, "I made the dwelling-place of my lordship glorious."<sup>26</sup>

These palace inscriptions prompted James Montgomery to declare that the setting of the king's "self-complacence in his glorious Babylon are strikingly true to history."<sup>27</sup> Robert Pfeiffer, who believed that Daniel was written over three centuries later than its traditional date, was justifiably mystified as to how all this would be known by a Palestinian author in the Maccabean era. He resigned himself to the fact that we may never know.<sup>28</sup>

The inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar are poetic, pious, hymnic and prayerful. A moral element is present, but comments about military accomplishments are almost always absent. They are written in the first person and stress his building achievements. They seem to betray one major character flaw. They are egocentric (constantly using the pronouns "I," "my")

<sup>21</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 60, I 36, 62, I 44 Nebuchadnezzar also made the same claim (147, II 8)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* 73, lines 31-32, 139, line 60

<sup>23</sup> P W Coxon, "The Great Tree of Daniel 4," *A Word in Season* (ed W McKane, Sheffield JSOT, 1986) 104-105 Coxon suggests that the metal bands around the trunk in Dan 4 15 are a parallel to Mesopotamian cultic trees

<sup>24</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 95, III 27-42

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 119, II 53-54

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* 121, lines 32-34, 139, IX 2

<sup>27</sup> Montgomery, *Daniel* 243

<sup>28</sup> R Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York Harper, 1948) 758-759

and express an inordinate pride about his construction feats.<sup>29</sup> In short, they closely parallel the style purportedly used by the king in Daniel 4.

His inscriptions are much different from Persian and Greek monuments with which an author living in Maccabean times would be familiar. It would have taken a well-read and highly-educated person who was close to the king to have had enough information to write in a style that the monarch himself regularly employed.

Louis Hartman claims that "certain correct historical allusions and the nature of the Aramaic" open the possibility that this story may have begun in oral form at the end of the Neo-Babylonian period and found literary expression in the Persian period.<sup>30</sup> Hartman's remarks reflect a major trend in liberal Biblical scholarship: to date the narrative portions of the book of Daniel earlier than the Maccabean era.<sup>31</sup>

#### IV. THE GILGAMESH EPIC AND THE KING'S MADNESS

The Biblical description of Nebuchadnezzar's madness is not unique in ancient Near Eastern literature. The portrayal of the king's humiliation closely parallels the Mesopotamian picture of the primordial man, Enkidu, found in the Gilgamesh epic. His whole body is covered with hair like a woman. His locks sprout like grain. He knows nothing about people or land. He eats grass with the gazelles, and with the game he drinks at the water hole. He ranges at large over the open country. When he becomes civilized in seven days he loses his kinship with the animals, and they run from him.<sup>32</sup> One might say he loses the heart of an animal and receives a human heart (cf. Dan 4:16).

Gardner and Maier see Enkidu as a representation of the low primitive state from which civilized people sprang.<sup>33</sup> The same picture is found in a Sumerian story that relates a dispute between the cattle and grain deities. In this tale primordial humans "knew not the wearing of garments." They ate grass with their mouths like sheep. They drank water from ditches.<sup>34</sup> Berossus describes early men of Babylonia as devoid of culture and living without laws, just like wild animals.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar* 98

<sup>30</sup> Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel* 174

<sup>31</sup> A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 8, 75. Lacocque holds that Daniel 4 was worked out orally before the second century but put in writing in 164 BC. John Collins is adamant in stating that there is not one single verse in Daniel 1-6 that betrays editorial insertion from Maccabean times, J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision in the Book of Daniel* (Missoula: Scholars, 1977) 8-16.

<sup>32</sup> A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949) 19-22.

<sup>33</sup> J. Gardner and J. Maier, *Gilgamesh* (New York: Vintage, 1984) 15, cf. J. Tigay, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982) 202.

<sup>34</sup> Tigay, *Evolution* 203.

<sup>35</sup> Berossus, *SANE*, 1, 155.

A king being warned about possible reduction to an animal-like state is not unique to the book of Daniel. A generation before the time of Nebuchadnezzar's father, a Median king receives such a warning in one of Esarhaddon's treaties.<sup>36</sup> If he does not recognize the authority of his overlord, this king will be condemned to expulsion from gods and men. He must roam the open country like a wild ass or gazelle (cf. Dan 5:21).

All these parallels closely match the state to which Nebuchadnezzar is reduced. He is driven out from humans and lives with the wild ass. He receives the heart of an animal. He lives in the open field and eats grass like an ox. His fingernails become like the claws of an eagle. All this must take place until seven periods of time pass over him (4:15-17, 29-32; 5:21). The king in seven periods of time undergoes the reverse process that Enkidu experiences in seven days. Tragically and ironically he becomes like the wild oxen and the dragons he repeatedly boasted about placing on the gates of Babylon.<sup>37</sup> He is reduced to the lowest state to which a man could descend in the Mesopotamian conception. He is demoted to the original state of man before he received the civilization of which Nebuchadnezzar is so proud.

The phrasing of Nebuchadnezzar's fate according to these parallels seems to be a sterling example of communication. The king was warned that he would descend from the most exalted state of humanity to the lowest state of existence a Mesopotamian mind could conceive of. There would have been no plainer way to tell an educated Babylonian he would be humbled than to inform him that he was going to become like Enkidu.

D. J. Wiseman notes that schools in Nebuchadnezzar's reign were still making copies of the Gilgamesh epic.<sup>38</sup> Since this epic was one of the most widely circulated pieces of Babylonian literature, the king would certainly have been familiar with it.<sup>39</sup>

#### V. OTHER GILGAMESH PARALLELS

The parallels between Daniel 4 and the Gilgamesh epic do not end here. Both these works have statements of the glorification of a king's building accomplishments.<sup>40</sup> Both are concerned about the mortality of a human king and the consequences of arrogance toward deity.<sup>41</sup> Each narrative tells of the chopping down of a very extraordinary tree. In Gilgamesh and Daniel 4 "watchers" have a prominent part in the plot. Each piece has a troubling dream or dreams that must be interpreted.

Watchers (cf. Dan 4:13, 17, 23) are important figures in the Gilgamesh epic. Besides the guardian of the cedar there are watchers of the night. There are scorpion people who are stationed at the gate through which Gil-

<sup>36</sup> E. Reiner, "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," *ANET* 538

<sup>37</sup> Langdon, *Königsinschriften* 73, lines 20-21

<sup>38</sup> Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar* 86

<sup>39</sup> Heidel, *Gilgamesh* 16, 93

<sup>40</sup> *ANET* 72-73

<sup>41</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, "Mesopotamian Mythology II," *Or* 17 (1948) 17-48. Oppenheim pointed out that the epic contains unprecedented arrogance toward the gods.

gamesh must pass to find out about eternal life.<sup>42</sup> The Babylonians knew of personified night watchers who, alert and never sleeping, control destinies on the earth.<sup>43</sup> Deities were in charge of watching the night while the great gods slept.<sup>44</sup>

Gilgamesh is especially proud of his expedition with Enkidu to the cedar mountain in which he killed the guardian and chopped down the sacred cedar.<sup>45</sup> The cedar mountain is the dwelling place of the gods. It has a gate seventy-two cubits high. The towering cedar "uplifted its fullness before the mountain; fair was its shade and full of delight."<sup>46</sup> Gardner and Maier observe that the cedar on the mountain is in the singular and see the forest as a single world tree.<sup>47</sup> The cedar is protected by a guardian appointed by Enlil, the high god. The guardian Huwawa is a watcher who never sleeps.<sup>48</sup>

Abraham Malamat has called attention to many examples of Mesopotamian kings from Sargon I and onward who seemed to have been obsessed with the cedar mountain. A royal inscription of Naram-Sin, Sargon's grandson, extols his conquering the mountain and personally felling cedars there.<sup>49</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar speaks of finding one of Naram-Sin's inscriptions and refers to him as an ancestor (*abu*).<sup>50</sup> Apparently this type of exploit was considered necessary before a ruler could be classified as a great king.

In reading the Wadi Brissa inscription, one is made to feel that Nebuchadnezzar identified his Lebanon campaign with Gilgamesh's expedition to the cedar mountain. This is the longest of his engravings (800 lines). He made the gigantic work in duplicate on each side of the pass through which his troops would have marched in Lebanon on their way to the west.

A little farther away a partial triplicate is found. It is the only monument of Nebuchadnezzar that commemorates a military expedition. It is dated by Stephen Langdon to the time of the final destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC).<sup>51</sup> Part of it is written in ancient archaic script. Berger finds many word-for-word correspondences with the royal engravings of Hammurapi.<sup>52</sup>

Twenty times the mighty cedars are mentioned. Nebuchadnezzar calls Lebanon "the lush, green mountain forest of Marduk."<sup>53</sup> Twice in the inscription he boasts that he felled the mighty cedars with his own clean hands.<sup>54</sup> The inscription depicts the king in a pointed, conical hat like the

<sup>42</sup> Heidel, *Gilgamesh* 42, 65

<sup>43</sup> CAD 4 326

<sup>44</sup> ANET 390

<sup>45</sup> Heidel, *Gilgamesh* 35-37

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 45

<sup>47</sup> Gardner and Maier, *Gilgamesh* 133-134 E A Speiser sees the singulars used in the collective sense (ANET 82)

<sup>48</sup> Heidel, *Gilgamesh* 35

<sup>49</sup> A Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford Oxford University, 1989) 107-121

<sup>50</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 79, III 25-26

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 33-37

<sup>52</sup> Berger, *Konigsinschriften* 94-96

<sup>53</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 175, ix 14

<sup>54</sup> Ibid 153, A IV 5-8, 157, A V 16-18

ones worn by Merodach-Baladan and Nabonidus.<sup>55</sup> He is standing before a tree with an object in his hand. The deteriorated condition of the relief does not allow us to make out any more details.<sup>56</sup> In column 4, directly to the left of the tree, the king states: "With my own clean hands I felled (the mighty cedars)." It seems reasonable, then, to assume that this engraving portrays the king in the very act of chopping down a cedar.

Column 5 is written above and below the tree. Column 6 is in back of the king. Both columns describe in detail Babylon's elaborate defense system. The king boasts that he made the city into a mountain-high fortress. He goes on to state that he gathered all men to its shadow for their well-being, prosperity and blessing. His kingdom reached the ends of the earth, and he raised the city of Babylon to the summit.<sup>57</sup>

In column 9 he tells how he had chased away the enemy that had scattered the people and plundered the mountain. He gathered the people and made them lie down in security.<sup>58</sup> He built a special road through the mountains to transport the cedars back to Babylon. Among other things he used the cedars to roof his palace built on the bosom (*irtu*) of the wide world.<sup>59</sup>

This inscription clearly shows how totally obsessed Nebuchadnezzar was with the mighty cedars of Lebanon. It is little wonder that he dreamed about them. There would have been no more vulnerable point for God to speak to Nebuchadnezzar about his pride than through the metaphor of the great tree. He would have had little problem in identifying the sheltering, nourishing tree with his own kingdom. As an informed, educated pagan he would realize that this tree would have a divinely-appointed watcher just as everything significant in his world did. Imagine his horror and feeling of helplessness when the watcher actually announces the decree that the tree is to be cut down (Dan 4:13-14)!

He would have definitely considered this as an unfavorable nightmare needing the attention of dream professionals. According to A. Leo Oppenheim the Babylonian concept of interpretation would include not only explaining the meaning of the dream but also removing its undesirable consequences.<sup>60</sup> Only Daniel could do this by telling the king, in effect, that he must become the kind of ruler he had advertised himself to be in the Wadi Brissa inscription (Dan 4:27). He must be a true shepherd to the people entrusted to him by deity.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> J Oates, *Babylon* (London Thames and Hudson, 1979) 117, Roaf, *Cultural Atlas* 201

<sup>56</sup> H Pognon, *Wadi Brissa* (Paris F Vieweg, 1887) 4, 5, Plate IV

<sup>57</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 163, B V 43-44, 173, 1x 3-12

<sup>58</sup> Berger, *Konigsinschriften* 95-97

<sup>59</sup> Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 173, VIII 56

<sup>60</sup> A L Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia American Philosophical Society, 1956) 217-261

<sup>61</sup> Both Lugalzagesi and Hammurapi viewed themselves as making their subjects lie down in green pastures. Nebuchadnezzar takes over this metaphor in the Wadi Brissa inscription. Cf S N Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago University of Chicago, 1963) 323-324, Berger, *Konigsinschriften* 94-96, Langdon, *Konigsinschriften* 173, VIII 34



The king receives this prescription in total silence, even though it could have neutralized the foreboding evil. He is speechless because he has been caught by his own words. Ironically when the king makes his fateful boast a year later (Dan 4:29–30) he is probably standing on the very cedars he bragged about hewing down in the Wadi Brissa inscription.

What is the source of all this extraordinary information that so vividly displays the intents of the king's heart? This did not come from a third-century author living in Palestine who sought to revive interest in Babylonian lore. It came from a God who searches hearts and who knew the secret rooms in the king's soul. He is the one who knows best how to reach every one of us.

#### VI. THE "BABYLONIAN JOB" AND THE GENRE OF DANIEL 4

Daniel 4 purports to be the actual words of Nebuchadnezzar except for vv. 28–33. It begins with a hymn of praise (vv. 1–3) and closes with a hymn of praise (vv. 34–37). Its opening style is that of an epistle. It is conceded even by critics that the introduction is compatible with that of Neo-Babylonian and later epistles.<sup>62</sup>

Many have found it incredible that the king would issue such a document. Montgomery says that "as an edict the document is historically absurd; it has no similar parallels in the history of . . . imperial edicts."<sup>63</sup> While it is true that there are no "edicts" like Daniel 4, it is also true that the chapter does not claim to be an edict.

It is, however, incorrect to say that Daniel 4 has no matching genre in Babylonian literature. There is a Babylonian document called *Ludlul Bēl Nemeqi* ("I will praise the Lord of Wisdom" [Marduk]). This document shows a good deal of similarity to Daniel 4. The piece had a broad distribution in the ancient Near East judging from the fact that twenty-five copies and fragments of it have survived. It dates from about 1200 BC.<sup>64</sup> W. G. Lambert has even found an instance where it is quoted in a Neo-Babylonian royal inscription.<sup>65</sup> It is often referred to as the "Babylonian Job."<sup>66</sup>

The text is a "monologue of a well read and poetic Babylonian in a high position." Lambert conjectures that he may have been a feudal lord ruling a city.<sup>67</sup> Like Daniel 4 it opens and closes with a doxology and confession

<sup>62</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic* 61

<sup>63</sup> Montgomery, *Daniel* 222

<sup>64</sup> J. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 170–171, R. Biggs, "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," *ANET* 596–600. Since *ANET*, the publication of forty missing lines of Tablet 1 have been restored, cf. D. J. Wiseman, "A New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," *Anatolian Studies* 30 (1980) 104–107.

<sup>65</sup> W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 21–27, 284, 288.

<sup>66</sup> Oppenheim and Lambert do not see this work as the same genre as Job but rather as a psalm. Oppenheim, *Interpretation* 217, Lambert, *Babylonian* 27.

<sup>67</sup> Lambert, *Babylonian* 22.

of the deity's sovereignty to show mercy or judgment. It also contains affirmations of his god's universal kingship.<sup>68</sup> An opening line—"whose hands the heavens cannot hold back"—is reminiscent of Dan 4:35 ("He does according to his will in the host of heaven. . . . No one can ward off his hand)."<sup>69</sup>

As in Daniel 4, the speaker announces his intention to provide people with instruction in worship and to present his situation as a public example of his god's ability to punish and restore.<sup>70</sup> The person's situation is associated with a terrifying dream, as in Dan 4:5. The author repeatedly stresses that four classes of dream interpreters and omen experts could not help him.<sup>71</sup>

This unfortunate individual, like Nebuchadnezzar, used to walk like a proud man constantly prattling. He was put out of his house and had to wander outside like a recluse and an ox. He lost his position of authority and was replaced by someone else.<sup>72</sup> He was like one who had gone crazy. He was fettered. His fingernails grew out.<sup>73</sup>

As in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the same god who struck him down now raised him up. After his restoration he proceeds down "Bow Down, Proud One" Street saying, "He who has done wrong . . . let him learn from me."<sup>74</sup> Like Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4:2, he wanted to make known to all people what his god had done for him.

As a well-informed worshiper of Marduk, King Nebuchadnezzar would have known about various hymns written to his god. It is not unthinkable that he might have borrowed an old, time-honored pattern to communicate to his countrymen the testimony of his lesson in divine sovereignty. In one of his inscriptions he describes himself as causing "to exist in the mouths of men the fear of the great gods."<sup>75</sup>

#### VII. NEBUCHADNEZZAR: A JEWISH CONVERT?

When Nebuchadnezzar sat down to write about the things he had experienced, Daniel was available as an advisor to suggest to him ways to express acceptable worship to the God who had brought about the situation. He has been impressed that he needs to be more pious, but he still speaks of Bel or Marduk as being his god. He can still speak of a "spirit of the holy gods" being in Daniel (4:8, 18).

He has already expressed similar ideas within a pagan context. In Building Inscription Number 15 he says,

<sup>68</sup> Wiseman, "New Text" I 1-40, IV 33-45

<sup>69</sup> Biggs, "I Will Praise" I 9, 11, 27-32

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid* I 39-40, IV 27-46

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid* II 7-10, 106-110, cf Dan 4 6-7

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* I 50-104, II 21

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid* III e, g

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid* IV 9-10, III n-p

<sup>75</sup> Langdon, *Königsinschriften* 101, I 8-10

Without you, my lord, what exists? . . . You begot me and entrusted me with the rule over all peoples. . . Make the fear of your godhead be in my heart. Prolong the days of the one who pleases you, for you truly are my life.<sup>76</sup>

It has been noted that a few phrases in Daniel 4 are found in the Hebrew Psalter. But using Jewish liturgy to express himself does not make the king a convert to Judaism. It would also certainly not indicate that a Jew from the second century BC wrote Daniel 4.<sup>77</sup>

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

Daniel 4 is not a fabrication of someone in exile who felt insecure and wanted to imagine what it would be like if a great Babylonian king were converted to his faith. It genuinely reflects actual religious feelings and self-concepts that Nebuchadnezzar possessed. It is cast in the literary form and language of expression current during the time the king lived. It closely resembles his own personal style as found in his building inscriptions.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid 123-124, I 23-32, 55-72, II 1

<sup>77</sup> R P Davies, *Daniel* (Sheffield JSOT, 1988) 31, Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel* 51