

Old Saint Neb

I suspect that there aren't many people around who haven't heard of this ancient despot and ruler of the known world in the late 7th and mid 6th centuries B.C, by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. This is such a strange and melodious name to our western ears, that once it has been heard, it's doubtful that many will forget it. While he is well evidenced and securely proven in secular history, we find him also a major player in the history of the Hebrews where he is actually memorialized in the Book of Daniel. His historical relevance in Scripture has to do with his conquering of Judea, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the "enslavement" of the Jewish nation. God speaks of him as His great agent in this judgment of His people. In comparison, to God's judgment of the northern kingdom through the Assyrians, this judgment was comparatively mild, and temporary. God permitted the Assyrians to completely obliterate the northern kingdom, and scatter the people so completely that it never was able to be restored as a nation.

Throughout the centuries, God has preserved the identity of "His People", the Jews, where ever in the world He chose to disperse them. All that remained as physical evidence of the Northern Kingdom was the Samaritans, the so-called "half Jews." Samaria was the land that had been the northern kingdom. The few Jews that the Assyrians did not deport intermarried with pagan people that had been "imported" to replace the Jews that had been deported. With Judea, God called on Neb to destroy the Temple and end any further ruler-ship by the earthly component of the Davidic dynasty. Those in Judea were deported in three increments over a period of time that was limited to between 50 and 70 years, after which He arranged the return for those who chose to do so. God repeatedly spoke to the people through Jeremiah and Ezekiel urging them to accept God's judgment, as would be and was being inflicted by Neb. However, they chose to believe false prophets and so resented and resisted what God had wrought against them.

It was 606 BC when Neb, unaware that he was God's chosen one to inflict on Judea His "limited wrath," sacked Jerusalem, plundered the Temple and took a number of hostages

including Daniel and Daniels' three friends with whom we are well acquainted. He set up a vassal king from within the Davidic dynasty and left. Nine years later as a result of a revolt instigated by the influences of false prophets, Neb laid siege again, finally entering the city, taking 10,000 captives including Ezekiel, and installing Zedekiah as king. He also rebelled, breaking an oath of loyalty, the result of which, in 586, Neb destroyed the Temple and the city, taking all that were left with him to Babylon.

I have mentioned these well known events to point out the unusual restraint this proud, typically heartless tyrant showed toward these people. It could only have been through the workings of the Holy Spirit that would cause such an unnatural behavior by a king and a nation known for their military shrewdness. This of course, was all spirit-directed and part of God's plan from the beginning.

Let us pause for a moment to examine an aspect of this situation that is sometimes missed, and at best confusing. Why did God call for a period of captivity of exactly 70 years to the very day? We find what seems to be a clue in 2Chronicles 36:21 *"To fulfill the Word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill three score and ten years."* In Leviticus 26:34, 35 God instructs His people to till the soil for six years and give it rest on the seventh. That is called "the Sabbath of the land." The people ignored this commandment for 490 years, so in effect God told them that they owed the land one seventh of that time, or 70 years. As a result of this captivity, and thus their removal from the land, the land received the rest to which it was entitled, but of which it had been deprived. However, I believe also that it was their idolatry and other longstanding iniquities that were the causes of their captivity punishment. As we can see, it was seventy years from the time of the first invasion in 606 BC to Cyrus' decree in 536 BC that they were in captivity.

This has been called "the servitude of the nation". However, it is likely that the land did not begin its rest until the total destruction of Jerusalem, and the removal of all the people from the land, which occurred in 586 BC. The fact that they began returning in 536 BC,

only 50 years later, appears to create a dilemma. This is reconciled when we realize that the returning remnant of only about 50,000 was not enough to rebuild the temple and the city, and to also till the land with hostile neighbors. They didn't need to, because this problem was anticipated. Scripture tells us that they came from Babylon supplied with all that they needed, including food! Being harassed as they were by their neighbors precluded their use of the land, even if they had wanted to. It was only upon having completed the reconstruction of the city and its walls, was it possible to return to the normal life, and to again begin farming. This occurred with arrival of Ezra, in 516 BC, exactly, 70 years after the destruction of the temple, and the beginning of their full removal from the land! This 70-year period has been called "the desolation of Jerusalem". Thus we have two specific God-ordained semi-concurrent 70-year periods of punishment, each lasting 70 years to the very day! The first, because of their evil idol-worshipping ways, and the second, for their abuse of the life-giving land.

What a lesson this should be for us. It is that God never forgets, and that His justice must eventually, and always prevail. He may long suffer the people to ignore His laws, blaspheme Him, and repeatedly commit every possible iniquity, but when it becomes His appointed time, His wrath will come, one way or another. This may be called "Law of Justice" both individually and corporately that will be levied in His perfectly chosen time and manner. God's recording of history alludes to this over and over again. Even redeemed souls, those who have become His sons and daughters, those whose sins have been forgiven should expect some form of earthly retributive consequences for their sins. Although their salvation, that is their eternal existence with God in the heavenlies, is not at stake, there are nevertheless both earthly and eternal consequences of sin. In my commentary called "Do Christians suffer more than Others People?" there are described ten reasons why. They include punishment for sin.

We need but look around us, and even in our own lives to see many of these earthly consequences. But what about this idea that there are also spiritual consequences of sins committed by saved souls? This has to do with one's position within God's eternal kingdom. The good works that led to the saving of souls are attributed to them as earned

rewards, or crowns that will benefit them forever through more God-serving positions within the eternal realm. However, the earned benefits can be lost, that is cancelled out by one's ignorance, apathy, resistance and failures during the sanctification process. All aspects in the life of redeemed souls will be judged by Jesus as they appear before Him in heaven at the Bema seat. That's when the inventory of selfless God-honoring good works will be weighed against the worthless man-honoring good works that each soul has performed.

One needn't probe to any great depth to learn most of what we know about Neb, for it is a fascinating story written with clarity and easily understood in the context of an historical period. However, a deeper examination is necessary in order to glean the more subtle aspects of this great historical personage and how God used him for purposes beyond that as His agent of destruction and punishment. His story also serves as an example of how God can take the worst of the worst of us and mold us into His fruitful faithful and redeemed servants.

We find at the very beginning of Daniel's inspired writings, what to us may seem to be the epitome of continued ruthlessness cruelty and evil, when Neb calls on his advisors and sooth sayers, or magi, and charges them not only to interpret his dream, but also to relate it in detail. At this point he had only recently become king, and these were all his father's advisors whom he had inherited. He was ready to put them all to death unless they could fulfill his demand. Of course, no human could do such a thing absent the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. As scripture tells us, they were as good as dead until this young captive from Jerusalem claimed that he could both describe the dream and tell what it meant. Of course through his great faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit, he did. As a result of this, and his other valuable attributes and abilities, Daniel soon became number one man in the kingdom under Neb.

Scripture makes it clear that God used Neb as His instrument for the punishment of Judea. God used him in other ways as well, as is evidenced by having given him a considerable amount of space in the historical component of His precious Book. As is

always the case, what God chose to record about him, and his involvement in His plan are there for our learning and therefore should be worthy of serious study. In this context, before we delve further, let us always keep in mind that whatever he did, or what the affects were, all things were in accordance with either God's directive or His permissive will.

The first we hear of him is when, as a very young general in his father's army, he had invaded and conquered Egypt. On his way back from that conquest he layed siege to Jerusalem, having already over run the entire countryside of Judea. His siege was successful and as a result he partially plundered the Temple and took captives of what he perceived to be the brightest and most useful of God's people. Let's stop here for a moment to again appreciate the significance and importance of his actions. This was a huge departure from the ways of the Assyrians, and other conquerors. For instance, the Assyrians indiscriminately killed, dispersed and placed in slavery the people of the northern kingdom so that they could never again cause them trouble. But young Neb. was guided to do things quite differently.

While what to us would be considered sadistic torture and inhumane treatment, as was typical of that era, through God's hidden influence he chose to spare the integrity of the nation, and even of the royal line. We also learn later that the captives did not become slaves, but were allowed to successfully assimilate into the Babylonian society, without giving up their Jewish heritage and customs. From a strategic military perspective, this was a very poor policy decision, as evidenced by the fact that he needed to twice more lay costly sieges against Jerusalem, when a single totally smashing blow, followed by the appointment of his own people to rule over Jerusalem, would have been more typical and most effective. This is just what Cyrus did to Babylon and most conquerors did throughout history in the lands they subdued. How could a man of such great military abilities been so inept at his profession in this one particular conquest? It's because he was under a divine directive in all of these actions!

You may ask why I call him Saint Neb. It is simply to illustrate that I believe that in the end God called him to the faith, and having affectually forgiven him all of his sins. When he died his soul resided in Shoel along with Abraham and all other Old Testament saints for over 500 years until Jesus emptied the “Paradise” side of Shoel, and brought his soul, along with all the other Old Testament saints to heaven where they wait for a reunion with their then incorruptible bodies. This may seem incredible, given the “horrendous crimes against humanity” that he appears to have committed, and what seemed initially to be a nature devoid of any redeeming qualities. However, was he any different from any of us, other than by the magnitude of his sins? Where sin and forgiveness is concerned, magnitude is not a factor, it’s all about repentance and subsequent faith, humility and obedience. We find that all of these did manifest in him as his own very public testimony clearly reveals. However, I find that what to me is one more significant bit of evidence for this contention. For this I refer to what Daniel said to Neb’s grandson, Belshazzar, when he was called to translate the handwriting on the wall.

Here is what might be called an eulogy to Neb. Daniel 5:18-21. *“O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor: and for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: and he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; til he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.”* Such praise coming from one of God’s great chosen, and the one who spoke so much for God, must have great credibility. Notice he doesn’t avoid speaking of what we would consider highly sinful, yet he credits him with greatness in the spiritual as well as in the worldly realm. Such a glowing endorsement from Daniel is one any of us should pray to earn.

Before we venture into his own testimony, let us take a brief look at that statue Daniel saw in Neb's dream. As Daniel most clearly informs us, it was a representation of the five world empires that would exist prior to the end of the world. The first two world empires, Egypt, and Assyria were not considered in that at that point in time, because only the future ones would then have relevance. Notice the first was Neb's empire, expressed as the head of gold. Then followed the future ones in descending order toward the end times as symbolized by silver, (Persian/Median) bronze, (the Greeks under Alexander,) the Roman as iron, (in two segments) and the final empire, that of Antichrist. This one would be as iron mixed with clay. In later chapters of Daniel, he provides a great deal of clarifying evidence as to how these fit and contribute to God's greater plan.

Notice also that, in the statue, the qualities of these empires are compared in terms of the metal that symbolizes each. Gold of course, was the most valuable with silver and bronze and iron listed in descending orders of value. Does this mean that Neb's governmental structure was, according to God, the very best of all of the then future empires? I believe so, because first Daniel says so in Daniel 2:37-39 and second, because I believe that God, regardless of Neb's brutal nature, put His hand on it and guided it the entire time that Neb. was alive. His "Hand" was there also represented through Daniel and the influence he had over Neb. Why do I believe this? The first point of evidence is the 20 years of abnormal patience and tolerance he had with Judea, as already described. Secondly, consider the fact that from the entire population, probably numbered in the many hundreds of thousands that were carried away, only 50,897 chose to return at the end of the 70 years. (Ezra 2)

Shouldn't they all, or almost all, been eager to get out of hated Babylon and back to their own land? No, because once they got to Babylon, they quickly assimilated into the society and built peaceful, meaningful and comfortable lives. And except for the short term aftermath of the three sieges when segments of them were herded to Babylon, they were able to also regain their customs and their religion, which of course could no longer involve the Temple. In Daniel 6:10 we are shown an example of how many of the remnant might have expressed their faith while in Babylon. Quite obviously, contrary to

what is generally concluded, they were not slaves very long, if at all after they reached Babylon, but were quickly accepted into the society, even though they remained set apart ethnically and religiously. This is because they probably had some unique and valued skills, and so were able to benefit the Babylonian culture. Many reached high levels within the governmental structure of this and subsequent cultures, as evidenced by Daniel and his three friends, as well as people mentioned in the Book of Ruth.

As we witness with great admiration the unyielding, persevering strength of Daniel's faith, we must conclude that his day to day close contact with Neb. must have had some significant spiritual influence on him. We find Neb's first encounter with our Creator God when Daniel credited Him with the power to have described and interpreted the dream. Neb's response is expressed in Daniel 3:47 where he calls Him the "God of gods." That's not much in terms of faith, but it demonstrates an awareness he hadn't previously expressed. However his pride and worldliness was as yet not diminished, for soon after that he had a huge 90 foot high golden statue of himself erected. Then he commanded that everyone worship the statue under pains of death. That of course led to the furnace scene for Daniel's three friends, Daniel must have been out of town at this time. Obviously Neb. was yet far from being Saint Neb. Of course seeing these guys survive the furnace episode without even their clothes being scorched and also seeing a fourth man "like a son of the gods" in there as well, was another positive shocker.

His response to the boys when they walked out of the furnace is found in chapter 3 verse 29 where he says *"Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."* It seems that some bit of his natural Neanderthal type of reasoning came upon him in this case, rather than the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Can you imagine the Holy Spirit advocating the "cutting to pieces" any inadvertent blasphemers? Surely sainthood at this point seems most likely. However, it really wasn't, because we find in the next chapter that God had had enough of Neb's pride and

brutality, and was about to take him to the “woodshed” where all his pride would be extracted.

How strange and ironic it seems that this citadel of evil, the place where serious rebellion against God first began, and where it will end, at the end of the Great Tribulation, should have become the capital of the most God-pleasing kingdom of all of the great world kingdoms. It was also very short-lived, lasting a little more than 70 years. In terms of its eminence however, it was even shorter, having quickly gone into decay after Neb’s death in 561 BC, twenty-two years before its fall. His son Evil-merodach succeeded him, lasting only about two years. After a military coup another son, Neriglissar was chosen. He lasted about 6 years and was replaced by his son who was deposed after only two months in favor of the husband of Neb’s daughter. Her name was Nitocris. It was her husband, Nabonidus who reigned to the end in 539 BC when the Persians over ran the empire. Scripture doesn’t mention him, but speaks of Belshazzar as the king at that time. Bible scoffers had a great time for many years claiming that the Bible was wrong in this instance, because secular history only mentioned Nabonidus and not Belshazzar. However, archeological finds vindicated the Bible account (as if any were needed). Although, Nabonidus was king, he left the country naming his son Belshazzar as co-regent over Babylon in his absence.

Another collaboration of Neb’s humiliation was found on one of the scrolls from cave 4 in Qumran which reads as follows: *“the words of the prayer that the king of Assyria and Babylon, the great king prayed when he was smitten with a malignant disease by the decree of the Most High God in the city of Temi. I was smitten seven years and from men I was put away, but when I confessed my sins and my faults, God allowed me to have a soothsayer. (Daniel) This was a Jewish man of the exiles in Babylon. He explained and wrote to render honor and great glory to the name of the most high God”* Again, as if any such thing is required, archeology had validated Scripture in a most emphatic way. What Neb is here summarizing, is that final great episode related to his dream about the great tree, as Daniel interpreted it for him in Daniel 4:24-27. This was a preview of God’s final salvo against Neb’s terrible pride, a pride so deeply rooted that it took 7 years

of being like a barn animal to drain it out of him so that the Holy Spirit could get at the task of saving his soul. The whole of chapter 4 is in fact a testimony written entirely by Neb himself. In it he recites how he was so greatly humbled by having to live like a beast in the pastures for seven years, completely out of his normal mind, (it was the disease called lycanthropy where one believes he is an animal). This chapter summarizes what I believe is the testimony of a repentant, humble soul to whom was imputed a saving faith, just as it was to Abraham, Rahab, and other Old Testament Saints. Neb died a year later.

When the end of the empire had come and the Persians were already in the city, Daniel was called to the great hall by Belshazzar to interpret the handwriting on the wall. Here we read in Daniel 5:18-21, as already quoted hereinabove, the last mention of Neb, as Daniel gives the highest tribute to him. For such praise coming from one of the most esteemed and exalted prophets in all of Scripture, the man “greatly beloved” by God, (Daniel 9:23) who can doubt the claimed destiny of Neb’s soul?

What other messages or insights might the Lord be offering us through what He has shared regarding Neb. and his part in history? What has come to me is as follows:

1. As mentioned previously, God chose Neb to be His agent in dealing with sin-filled rebellious Judea. He singled out this barbaric leader of a country that was, and still is to this day, an unrepentant center of evil. It was the place where man’s post-flood rebellious nature first manifested in Nimrod, and where idol worship began through him and his consort Simeronus. This seems to have continued to be the place of spiritual darkness, and where Satan so long ago laid the cornerstone of his church which he has been building for his son, Antichrist. Throughout the centuries it seems to have been his special place as evidenced by many mini antichrists, dealers in idols and false religions that have continued in the region, even into the present. It is the original source of all false religions that have now spread throughout the world. After the coming 7 year period of Tribulation, and throughout the millennium, Babylon will be one of the two places on earth that Jesus will not restore to a livable environment. (Isaiah 13:19-22) the other place is Edom.

2. Why did God chose to raise Babylon up to be a power worthy of being, from the biblical perspective, among the seven greatest powers to ever rule, and why was it singled out to have been the best of them all? Also if it was the best, why didn't it continue longer and spread further? Perhaps these questions can be at least partially answered by the following observations:

- Given that Babylon was as described in (1) above, God was expressing His sovereignty and power over everything by choosing the very worst of places to serve His divine purpose, something that to man, through his lack of godly wisdom, would be foolish.

There are many evidences of God's choosing seemingly illogical ways just to demonstrate His omnipotence. Remember, how God reduced Gideon's army to but 300 against several tens of thousands of Midinites so as to prove His preeminence. He led Moses and His people to be hopelessly trapped at the edge of the Red Sea so that He could show His power by parting the waters. Didn't Jesus seek out the lowest of sinners and toughest medical cases to save and cure for a similar reason?

- The case was proven beyond any further need when He stooped into the realm of the "impossible", just to save you and me.
- Also, as already mentioned, after the Babylon kingdom came to full power, it lasted only 70 years. It seems to me, God brought forth this man Neb. to be His agent for reasons other than to express His wrath on Judea. I believe that it was also to use him to simply express His great mercy toward them and to bring about some measure of repentance, although not necessarily its fullness unto salvation. Unlike what He did to the Northern Kingdom, it was a limited purging of certain aspects of their rebellious nature. The clues to this that seem significant to me are hinted at in the Book of Esther. There we find Hamen describing the former Babylonian captives, now under Persian rule, as "a dispersed people, dispersed through the entire kingdom having diverse laws and not keeping the king's laws." These diverse laws I believe refer to the Mosaic Laws, and perhaps

to some segments of the dispersed Jews who actually lived in the spirit of the law absent formal temple worship. Surely Daniel and his friends, along with Ezekiel, provided evidence for this premise. I believe Esther and Mordicai did also, even though by then they too were under post-Babylonian rule. In this case, we might conclude that the structure Neb set up for the Jews was all that God commissioned him to do, and the God-ordained effects of that structure would remain with them throughout several subsequent generations.

- Am I venturing too far afield to suggest what follows, as also being part of Neb's legacy? In a search of Scripture, I believe one will not find any evidence of continued idol worship by the Hebrews after entry into Babylon. Nowhere even in the New Testament can I find evidence of any worship such as that of the golden calf, phallic symbols on mountains, or graven images. We find that they had severe on-going faith problems, but worship of idols does not seem to have been among them. Isn't this incredible, given that idol worship was so ingrained in them before the captivity, and then having been plunged into a society reflecting the epitome of every known kind of idol worship? How could this possibly be? It's another example of how mysteriously God works in the lives of those in whom He chooses to work. Not only did the Jews of this early stage of their dispersion seem to develop and exhibit extraordinary leadership skills, but also great business acumen that led to their being able to acquire considerable wealth while in "captivity."

This of course, allowed them to exert influence well beyond their numerical proportion of any society they were in. This was true even though these societies were very often hostile, and highly discriminatory, just as it is and has been in this modern era. Evidence of this appears throughout history. The one famous example of the culmination of this God-given propensity to gain wealth might be expressed in the sons of Amschel Bauer who changed his name to Rothschild. His 5 sons, at the

end of the 18th century, and well beyond the first half of the 19th century controlled respectively, the national banks, and therefore the governments of England, Germany, France, Austria-Hungry, and Italy. By the beginning of the 20th century it was common knowledge that this one family controlled more than half of the wealth of the entire world. There were, and are many other Jewish families, such as the Warburgs, that also accumulated fabulous amounts of wealth. Could this have been one of God's ways of preserving them as a people in counterbalance to the never-ending hatred, discrimination and attempts to eliminate them that have continued on into the current times? Could these particular abilities have begun through Neb's God-ordained handling of these people, policies that through God's guidance of Cyrus and his successors, continued to allow?

3. Neb's father was a great king in his own right, having liberated Babylon, which had for centuries been dominated by the Assyrians. Not only had he affected this, but he conquered the entire Assyrian empire only to die shortly after, leaving Neb to be king. Neb was equally skilled in the art of war, as he so demonstrated by subduing all of Egypt and Judea including Jerusalem, a task the Assyrians were never able to accomplish. Arriving back in Babylon, now the king of the dominate empire of that time, Neb had nothing but great successes and achievements at a very early age. Could there be any greater ego-building pride-engendering background than this? He acquired pride-inducing success from whatever he did and was accountable to no one. That dream that spoke of his as being the golden, the very best of all empires was certainly the crowning glory of his great love of himself, when Daniel explained its significance.

We see that it culminated in the golden statue of himself that was to be worshipped as god, under pains of death. Having witnessed Daniel giving credit to the most great God, seeing three boys survive the furnace, and Daniels' survival of the lions den, all credited to God, Neb. was certainly exposed to the miraculous power of God and came to believe that He existed. However, none of

this diminished his insufferable pride. Even his close association with Daniel and his impeccable faith-governed life didn't seem to soften him. He was a tough case, so God used extreme measures to bring him to his knees in humility, gratitude, and finally a saving faith. As we perceive Neb's problem, these three proverbs come to mind as God's pronouncement to all of us. Proverbs 11:2 "*when pride cometh, then cometh shame...*" Proverbs 16:18 "*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before the fall.*" Proverbs 29:23 "*A mans pride shall bring him low...*", and this it surely did to Neb.

If you are saved, what did it take to bring you to a repentant humbleness, that characterizes a saving faith? We know that God works in mysterious ways, and that He is "*---not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" (2Peter 3:9) Furthermore, He knows who will and will not answer His call to faith. Are you certain that you are one of them? Some have hearts that are so hardened that they will never come to repentance, such as Pharaoh in the Exodus story. Therefore we see that God doesn't get all of what He wants. Why? How can it be then that so many perish when He isn't willing that they do so? It is because, having given man a will of his own, that is a choice in this matter, He will not violate or override it. We might say that in giving man a will independant from His own, it was necessary for God to relinquish some measure of His own. Otherwise the idea of man having a truly free- will would be but a sham. However, we see here, in the case of Neb., God will go to extreme measures to expedite that which He knows is in a person's heart. In Pharaoh's case, God knew that the hardness of his heart was such that nothing would soften it, and so he simply hardened it even more so as to get on with the task at hand. In Neb's case, He saw a heart that was willing to yield to Him, if he could only be rid of his pride.

Who among us, can say that they never experience at least moments of pride? Doesn't at least some momentary bit of pride come to us as a result of some achievement for which we have struggled? It's ingrained in our nature to take credit for our successes. The greater the success, the greater the pride of that success is likely to be. I believe that perhaps the most difficult task of the indwelling Holy Spirit as He guides the justified

soul along the sanctification process is to continually remind that soul as to where the true credit lies so that eventually every bit of pride has been eliminated and replaced with gratitude to our God who is the only source of all goodness in one's life. We should give prayers of gratitude that our individual pride never reached such heights as to require 7 years of eating grass and dirt in order to rid us of it!

P.S.

Although the focus of this commentary is Neb., we should take a moment to reflect on the Book in which his moment of glory is expressed. In the Book of Daniel, Neb is but a supporting actor. Daniel is the leading man, and hero, under Gods authority. Through him, God revealed some of the most awesome and profound prophecies to be found in all of Scripture. Some of those already fulfilled are so clear and well defined that biblical scoffers have tried for centuries to find ways of discrediting them. He predicted the Persian /Mede Empire that followed the fall of Babylon, about 50 years before it happened. And his predictions of the Greek and Roman empires are so specific that they defy all attempts to credibly cast doubt as to their authenticity. In desperation, scoffers who admit the extraordinary accuracy of these prophecies, claim that they were secretly inserted in the Book after they occurred. Our all- knowing God anticipated and negated this claim, when in about 300 BC, 70 Bible experts were commissioned to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. The great care taken to do this most accurately is punctuated by the fact that it took them around 30 years to do it! Many of Jesus' quotes of Scripture are from this Greek translation called the Septuagint. Note that this document came into being about 200 years after the Book of Daniel was written, which makes the forgery claims ridiculous.

The world empire predictions go well beyond those already fulfilled. They include allusion to Antichrist and his world government as well as to Jesus' second coming. In the so-called 70-week prophesy, the date when Jesus would declare Himself King as He rode the donkey into Jerusalem, as well as when the Jews would re-establish themselves as the nation of Israel (May 14, 1948) were most accurately predicted. It also predicted

the sacrificial death of Jesus as well as the length of the reign of the antichrist. The last of Daniels' prophetic statements even gives what seems most certainly, the number of days "gap" between the end of the Great Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. The Book is 358 action-packed verses that should keep everyone who reads it on the edge of their seats anxious to read what is next.

Here is one final observation that intrigues me. The archangel Gabriel is mentioned four times in Scripture, twice in Daniel and twice in Luke. In Daniel 8:16, 9:21 he appeared as a man and revealed the date of Jesus' declaration of His Kingship, and foretold of His death, as well as the purpose for which He died and what must precede His return. In Luke 1:19, 26) Gabriel appeared as a man and informed the priest Zacharias that he would have a son, John the Baptist, who would be the one who would announce Jesus to the world as the "Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world." Next Gabriel appeared as a man to Mary and foretold of Jesus being born to her in her virginity as the Son of God. How interesting it is that God chose Gabriel to deliver these, and as far as we are told, only these specific messages regarding Jesus' birth, ministry, death and return. Is there any significance to this? Perhaps it is just this simple. Gabriel, as an archangel, is among the highest order of angels. In all of Scripture, only two angels are identified by name, Gabriel and Michael. (Satan is a cherub, not a "regular" angel as we learn in Ezekiel 48:14) What ever number of other archangels there may be, we are told that Michael is the highest of them all. He the prominent war angel, while Gabriel is the greatest messenger Angel. No one of lesser stature would have been entrusted with these four messages, the most important messages ever entrusted to an angel.