

Who was Nebuzaradan in the Bible?

Nebuzaradan served under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Most Bible translations call him the captain of the guard. He carried out the destruction of Jerusalem after its capture in c. 587 BC, and Scripture states he took away many of its citizens into exile.

To establish the context of Nebuzaradan's actions, we must delve into how Judah and Jerusalem devolved.

In the tenth century BC, after the death of King Solomon, a schism occurred, leading to a split between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, each with its own king. Despite repeated warnings from prophets sent by God, the kingdoms fell into corruption and sin, Israel most of all. Because of their sin, God warned they would be overtaken by conquerors.

The northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. Judah rallied under King Hezekiah and narrowly avoided destruction from the forces of Assyria under Sennacherib only through miraculous intervention (2 Chronicles 32).

However, Hezekiah was followed by a slew of wicked kings, with only a couple of exceptions. The monarchy of Judah eventually became a series of puppet kings placed by Egypt and Babylon, some reigning for only three months.

Meanwhile, Babylon conquered Assyria and began its conquest to the west over former Assyrian territories as well as previously independent lands. When King Jehoiakim of Judah withheld tribute from the Babylonians, Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and carried off captives in 597 BC, placing puppet king Zedekiah on the throne.

Nebuzaradan appears in Scripture about ten years later. After Jerusalem fell to siege again in 587 and King Zedekiah was taken in chains to Babylon, 2 Kings 25:8-12 recounts how Nebuzaradan, the captain of the imperial guard (or literally translated, the “chief of executioners”), carried out the destruction of the city in 586.

Nebuzaradan “burned the house of the Lord and the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem” (2 Kings 25:9), and his men broke down the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:10). He then also carried a multitude of the people into exile, while leaving some of the poorest to tend the land (2 Kings 25:11-12). He gathered many of the influential men, including priests, military leaders, and council members, and brought them to Nebuchadnezzar, who had them put to death (2 Kings 25:18-21). Nebuzaradan evidently also returned to Jerusalem four years later and carried away 745 more captives (Jeremiah 52:30).

The Bible records little about Nebuzaradan himself, only his execution of the tasks prescribed to him by Nebuchadnezzar. However, we do know that he showed the prophet Jeremiah mercy, recognizing Jeremiah’s attempts to sway Judah to surrender to Babylon as being the will of God. (Jeremiah, known for his dramatic object lessons, had placed a yoke on his neck at God’s command and urged the nations to submit to the yoke of Babylon and live, as recorded in Jeremiah 27:2-11.)

The exchange between Nebuzaradan and Jeremiah, however, gives some insight into Nebuzaradan’s worldview. He begins by recognizing that Judah fell because of its sin and by God’s decree, saying, “The LORD your God pronounced this disaster against this place” (Jeremiah 40:2). He proceeded to release Jeremiah and offer him two options—come to

Babylon, where Nebuzaradan would look out for him, or return to Judah. When Jeremiah elected to return to his homeland, Nebuzaradan “gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go” (Jeremiah 40:5).

We know next to nothing about Nebuzaradan the man, but in him we see an interesting phenomenon. Even a Babylonian conqueror recognizes the hand of God in the destruction of Jerusalem and attributes the victory of his own people to the Lord’s will. As Judah fell away from God and incurred the due punishment for its sin, the glory and knowledge of God spread even to the brutal conquerors of God’s people.