Who was Nebuchadnezzar?

Nebuchadnezzar II, sometimes alternately spelled Nebuchadrezzar, was king of Babylonia from approximately 605 BC until approximately 562 BC. He is considered the greatest king of the Babylonian Empire and is credited with the construction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned by name around 90 times in the Bible, in both the historical and prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. Nebuchadnezzar receives the most attention in the book of Daniel, appearing as the main character, beside Daniel, in chapters 1-4.

In biblical history, Nebuchadnezzar is most famous for the conquering of Judah and the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC. Judah had become a tribute state to Babylon in 605 BC but rebelled in 597 BC during the reign of Jehoiachin and then again in 588 BC during the reign of Zedekiah. Tired of the rebellions, and seeing that Judah had not learned its lesson when he invaded, conquered, and deported Judah in 597, Nebuchadnezzar and his general, Nebuzaradan, proceeded to completely destroy the temple and most of Jerusalem, deporting most of the remaining residents to Babylon. In this, Nebuchadnezzar served as God's instrument of judgment on Judah for its idolatry, unfaithfulness, and disobedience (Jeremiah 25:9).

Secular history records Nebuchadnezzar as a brutal, powerful, and ambitious king, and the Bible, for the most part, agrees. However, the book of Daniel gives additional insight into his character. Daniel chapter 2 records God giving Nebuchadnezzar a dream about what kingdoms would arise after his own. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was a "head of gold" on a statue, with the descending parts of the body, comprised of silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay, representing the less powerful kingdoms that would come after him. Nebuchadnezzar demanded the astrologers and wise men to interpret

his dream without him telling it to them and, when they were unable to, Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the astrologers and wise men to be killed. Daniel spoke up and, through a miracle from God, interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The king then promoted Daniel to be one of his most influential advisers. Interestingly, when Daniel interpreted his dream, Nebuchadnezzar declared, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery" (Daniel 2:47).

In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar created a gold statue of himself and required all the people to bow down to it whenever the music played. Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused, and the king had them thrown into a blazing furnace. Miraculously, God protected them, and when they came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" (Daniel 3:28-29).

In Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is given another dream by God. Daniel interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar and informed him that the dream was a warning to the king to humble himself and recognize that his power, wealth, and influence were from God, not of his own making. Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the warning of the dream, so God judged him as the dream had declared. Nebuchadnezzar was driven insane for seven years. When the king's sanity was restored, he finally humbled himself before God. In Daniel 4:3, Nebuchadnezzar declares, "How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom

is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation." Nebuchadnezzar continued in Daniel 4:34-37, "For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?' … "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

The exclamations of Nebuchadnezzar recorded in the book of Daniel have led some to consider the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar became a believer in the one true God. History records Nebuchadnezzar being a follower of the Babylonian gods Nabu and Marduk. Is it possible that Nebuchadnezzar renounced these false gods and instead only worshiped the one true God? Yes, it is possible. If nothing else, Nebuchadnezzar became a henotheist, believing in many gods but worshiping only one God as supreme. Based on his words recorded in Daniel, it definitely seems like Nebuchadnezzar submitted himself to the one true God. Further evidence is the fact that God refers to Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant" three times in the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Was Nebuchadnezzar saved? Ultimately, this is not a question that can be answered dogmatically. Whatever the case, the story of Nebuchadnezzar is an example of God's sovereignty over all men and the truth that "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21:1).