



*The Most High  
God rules over  
the kingdoms of  
the world and  
appoints anyone  
he desires to  
rule over them.*

*(Dan 5:21b NLT)*

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# Introduction to Daniel Chapter 4

- Today we will begin looking at Daniel chapter 4.
- This chapter describes the last in a series of events in which God is dealing with King Nebuchadnezzar.
- Chapter 4 is *similar* to chapter 2 in the sense that it has a dream as its centerpiece.
- But it stands in *contrast* to *both* chapters 2 *and* 3 because there is no hint that Daniel or his companions are in personal danger.
- The focus of attention in *this* chapter is on the way in which God deals with *Nebuchadnezzar* himself.
- Consequently the chapter opens and closes with a declaration about the sovereign power of God (vv. 1–3, 34–37).
- This morning I plan to cover verses 1-18



# Nebuchadnezzar's Proclamation (4:1–3)

*4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! 2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. (NIV)*

*4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! (ESV)*

- Verse 1 is written in the form of a royal edict:
  - It identifies its author (*King Nebuchadnezzar* )
  - Specifies to whom it is addressed (*all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth*)
  - Followed by formal and customary greeting: “*Peace be multiplied to you!*”
- The fact that this edict is proclaimed **universally** to “*all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth*” indicates the **importance** that Nebuchadnezzar attached to his experience.
- He recognized that there were **many** besides himself who needed to take to heart what had been brought home to **him** under such extraordinary circumstances.

4:2 *It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.* (ESV)

- Here in verse 2 the **purpose** of Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation is given, namely, to tell of the power of the "*the Most High God*" as it has been exhibited in his life.
- Emphasis is placed here on God's "*signs*" and "*wonders*".
- The Lord had used **miracles** to demonstrate his existence and power to Nebuchadnezzar.
- "*It... seemed good*" to the king to share with **others** what God had done in his life (cf. the NIV translation : "*It is my pleasure*").
- This **should** be the attitude of **anyone** who is the recipient of God's blessings.
- If God has done something wonderful in our life, we should be **delighted** to share that experience with others

<sup>4:3</sup> How *great* are his signs, how *mighty* his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures *from generation to generation*. (ESV)

- Here Nebuchadnezzar praises Yahweh for his “*great*” and “*mighty*” miracles.
- These miraculous deeds included:
  - A dream revealed and interpreted (chap. 2),
  - Three men delivered from a fiery furnace (chap. 3),
  - The removal and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity and his kingdom (chap. 4).
- Through the experience recorded in this chapter, it was also graphically illustrated to Nebuchadnezzar that his **kingdom** as well as his **life** could be taken away by the Lord anytime he pleased without a moment’s notice.
- The king was now an old man and must have been acutely aware that soon death would bring an end to his life and thereby to his reign.
- But he acknowledges here that **Yahweh’s** kingdom is “*everlasting*” and “*endures from generation to generation*.”
- When you consider that these things were spoken by a powerful and well-known **pagan monarch**, it is truly incredible.



# Nebuchadnezzar Has Another Dream (4:4–9)

*4:4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. 5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. 6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. 7 When the magicians, enchanter, astrologer and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. 8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) 9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. (NIV)*

<sup>4:4</sup> I, Nebuchadnezzar, was *at ease in my house and prospering in my palace*. <sup>5</sup> I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head *alarmed* me. (ESV)

- God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar when he **least** expected it: he was “*at ease in [his] house and prospering in [his] palace*.” <sup>1</sup>
- These were the golden years of his reign. <sup>1</sup>
- It is not difficult to imagine him relaxing in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, enjoying the luxuries he must have felt that he deserved. <sup>1</sup>
- He thought of himself as successful and secure on his throne. He was master of all that he could see. <sup>1</sup>
- Suddenly the king’s carefree life was **shattered** by a strange dream. <sup>2</sup>
- The contrast between his state of mind in v. 4 and in v. 5 is **dramatic**. <sup>2</sup>
- The contents of this dream “*alarmed*” (cf. the NIV: “*terrified*”) him. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair B.; *The Preacher's Commentary* - Vol. 21: Daniel; (p. 90)

<sup>2</sup> Miller, Stephen R., Daniel, vol. 18, *The New American Commentary* (pp. 129–130)



<sup>4:6</sup> So I *made a decree* that *all the wise men* of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. <sup>7</sup> Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation (ESV)

- The matter is of such concern to the king that he issues “*a decree*” that “*all the wise men*” be summoned.
- Given the categories listed, it must have been a fairly sizable group that was assembled before the king to hear him tell his dream.
- They may have listened with some fear as they recalled a similar gathering about twenty years ago that had been extremely dangerous—an event in which some of them may have participated.
- One ***striking*** similarity between then and now was that the entire group of “*wise men*” was still ***completely unable*** to provide an interpretation.

*4:8 At last Daniel came in before me--he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods--and I told him the dream, saying, <sup>9</sup> “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. (ESV)*

- At last ***Daniel*** appeared before the king.
- No explanation is offered for his late arrival.
- Daniel may have ***deliberately*** delayed his coming in order to give the pagan wise men an opportunity to prove their inability before Yahweh again demonstrated his reality and power through him.
- Or perhaps Daniel was not at the palace with the other wise men when the call went out.
- Daniel was addressed by his Babylonian name, “*Belteshazzar*”, which would have been the name most people in Babylon knew him by.

4:8 At last Daniel came in before me--he who was *named Belteshazzar after the name of my god*, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods--and I told him the dream, saying, <sup>9</sup> "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that *the spirit of the holy gods* is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar declared that Daniel was “*named Belteshazzar after the name of my god*,” indicating either that the name of a deity was ***implied*** by his name or possibly that the name “Belteshazzar” ***included*** the name of a Babylonian god, probably Marduk.
- Nebuchadnezzar recognized that there was something special about Daniel, namely, “*the spirit of the holy gods*” was in him.
- Nebuchadnezzar had seen on a prior occasion how these “*holy gods*” had ***spoken through*** his faithful counselor.



## The Content of the Dream (4:10–18)

*4:10 These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. <sup>11</sup> The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. <sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.*

# The Content of the Dream (4:10–18)

*4:13 “In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven.*

*14 He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. “ ‘Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. 17 “ ‘The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.’*

# The Content of the Dream (4:10–18)

*4:18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." (NIV)*



*4:10 The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. <sup>11</sup> The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. <sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. (ESV)*

- Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a disturbing one.
- It is not difficult to see why a dream like this would haunt him, even though he did not fully understand its significance.
- He had seen a cosmic tree reaching into the heavens and visible throughout the earth.
- It was not only ***beautiful***, but it was also ***fruitful*** and provided protection and nourishment for the birds of the air and beasts of the field.

4:13 "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and *behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.* <sup>14</sup> He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. <sup>15a</sup> But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. (ESV)

- Suddenly a heavenly “*watcher, a holy one,*” was observed coming “*down from heaven.*”
- The terminology used here (“*behold*”), suggests that Nebuchadnezzar was ***astounded*** by this heavenly being.
- The term “*watcher*” literally means “one who is awake” and occurs only in this chapter (vv. 13, 17, 23) in the Bible.
- The idea is that this heavenly being is awake and keeping watch over the activities of the human race.
- “Holy watchers” is a good description of God’s ***angels***, for they both watch over the activities of human beings and are holy (cf. Ezek 1:18, where many eyes [in order to watch] are associated with the cherubs).

4:13 "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. <sup>14</sup> He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. <sup>15a</sup> But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, *bound with a band of iron and bronze*, amid the tender grass of the field. (ESV)

- Here we see the angel commands that the tree be cut down and stripped of its branches, leaves, and fruit.
- When this is done, the animals and birds are no longer able to enjoy its protection or be satisfied by its produce.
- Yet the tree is not to be **completely** destroyed.
- Its stump and roots are left standing in the middle of the grassy field, suggesting the possibility that the tree **may** grow again.
- The stump is to be "*bound with a band of iron and bronze*," which means that a strong band or fence was to be placed around the stump of the tree in order to protect it from destruction.
- Verses 23 and 26 demonstrate that this metal band is symbolic of the preservation of Nebuchadnezzar's life and kingdom.



4:15<sup>b</sup> *Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.* <sup>16</sup> *Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.* (ESV)

- Now the description changes from that of a ***tree*** to that which was ***symbolized by*** the tree: a ***man***.
- This man was to live outdoors with the animals of the field (“*in the grass* [eaten by the grazing animals] *of the earth*”), where he would be exposed to the elements of nature (“*wet with the dew of heaven*”).
- “*his mind*” will “*be changed*” from that of a man to that of an animal.
- “*Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him*” – This individual would actually believe himself to be an animal – a psychological phenomenon known as lycanthropy.

4:15<sup>b</sup> *Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.* <sup>16</sup> *Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let **seven periods of time pass over him.*** (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar's illness would continue until "*seven periods of time pass over him.*"
- Most scholars, ancient and modern, have interpreted the "seven times" as seven years, although there are those who take the phrase to denote merely a period of time, the length of which is unspecified.
- But it seems that the word "*time*" would be expected to designate some definite and well-known period of time such as days, weeks, months, or years.
- Since seven days, weeks, or even months seem to be too short a duration for the illness, it is reasonable to suppose that the time was seven years.
- The idea is that the full cycle of seasons, with all the changes in types of weather involved, would pass over the king seven times.

4:17 *The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.* (ESV)

- This verse indicates that “*the watchers*” are somehow involved in issuing the “*sentence*” that is decreed.
- Of course **ultimately**, this is **God’s** decision (as the second part of the verse makes clear), and the holy angels would naturally concur with what God has decreed.
- Heaven’s decision to judge this man with insanity was made in order that all “*the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men .*”
- As a further rebuke to Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and to that of all the kings of the earth, God points out that at times he even allows the “*lowliest of men*” to reign.
- This truth is borne out by the facts of history.
- Therefore, a king should not be filled with pride, for it is not by **his ability** but by **God’s permission** that he reigns.



*4:18 This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” (ESV)*

- Nebuchadnezzar now asks ***Daniel*** to interpret the dream.
- Although it is safe to assume that the pagan wise men of Babylon realized that the dream was a prophecy of doom for the king, none of them fully understood its meaning.
- Yet Nebuchadnezzar again expressed faith in his chief counselor’s ability because he was aware of Daniel’s special relationship with the spiritual world (cf. vss 8-9).

# Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's lesson that emphasis is placed here on the “*signs*” and “*wonders*” that Yahweh had employed to demonstrate his existence and power to Nebuchadnezzar.
- Do we **need** “*signs*” and “*wonders*” in order to demonstrate the existence and power of God?
- As you think about your answer, consider this verse: “*For what can be known about God is **plain** to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*” (Rom 1:19-20)

# Class Discussion Time

- We saw earlier that it gave Nebuchadnezzar “*pleasure*” to share with the whole world what God had done in his life.
- I then made the observation that this should be the attitude of any believer – if God has done something wonderful in our life, we should be delighted to share that experience with others.
- If you were to share something wonderful that God has recently done in your life, what would it be?
- I personally have found that telling about the good things that God has done in my life is often a good way to start a conversation that makes it easy to share the gospel with others in a very natural way.

# Class Discussion Time

- We saw today that Nebuchadnezzar's experience that is recorded in this chapter graphically illustrated to Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom as well as his life could be taken away by the Lord as he pleased without prior notice.
- While Nebuchadnezzar's experience is extraordinary, he is not unique in having something happen in his life that made him aware of his own mortality.
- What would be an example of something that God has done in your life that drove home to you the fact that ***your*** life can be taken away by the Lord at will?



# Class Discussion Time

- We saw where God brought a terrifying dream into the life Nebuchadnezzar when he least expected it: he was “*at ease in [his] house and prospering in [his] palace.*”
- Nebuchadnezzar is not the only person to become complacent during a period of prosperity.
- Can you think of a time in your own life where things seemed to be going well and you had become somewhat complacent until the Lord brought a serious disruption into your life?
- How did you view the disruption at the time? How do you view it now?

# Class Discussion Time

- We were reminded today of a principle of Biblical interpretation: where the scriptures are silent, we must also be silent.
- Or, to put it another way, we must be careful not to go beyond the text.
- Do you believe this is an important principle? What are some of the negative effects and consequences of going beyond the text of scripture?

# Class Discussion Time

- In our text today, causing Nebuchadnezzar to believe he was a beast was a form of judgment from God.
- This seems similar to people today who believe themselves to be something that they're not: a boy believes he is a girl, a girl believes he is a boy.
- Do you believe this could also be a form of God's judgment on those who believe such things?
- Maybe something like those described in 2 Thes 2:11 where "*God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false...*"