

Nebuchadnezzar's Madness (c. 573–569 BC)

Daniel 4

The King's Proclamation

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language that live in all the earth:
"May your peace abound!

2 It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.

3 "How great are His signs
And how mighty are His wonders!
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom
And His dominion is from generation to generation.

The King's Dream

4 "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.

5 I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and *these fantasies as I lay* on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

6 So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

7 Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

8 But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, *saying*,

9 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell *me* the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

10 'Now *these were* the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, *there was* a tree in the midst of the earth and its height *was* great.

11 'The tree grew large and became strong
And its height reached to the sky,
And it *was* visible to the end of the whole earth.

12 'Its foliage *was* 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 sky dwelt in its branches,
And all living creatures fed themselves from it.

13 'I was looking in the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed, and behold, an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven.

14 'He shouted out and spoke as follows:
"Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,
Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit;
Let the beasts flee from under it
And the birds from its branches.

15 "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground,
But with a band of iron and bronze *around it*
In the new grass of the field;
And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven,

And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

- 16 “Let his mind be changed from *that of* a man
And let a beast’s mind be given to him,
And let seven periods of time pass over him.
- 17 “This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers
And the decision is a command of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know
That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind,
And bestows it on whom He wishes
And sets over it the lowliest of men.”

18 This is the dream *which* I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell *me* its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.’

The Interpretation of the Dream

- 19 “Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.’ Belteshazzar replied, ‘My lord, *if only* the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!’
- 20 The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth
- 21 and whose foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged—
- 22 it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.
- 23 In that the king saw an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze *around it* in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,”
- 24 this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:
- 25 that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.
- 26 And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is* Heaven *that* rules.
- 27 Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’

The Fulfillment of the Dream

- 28 “All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.
- 29 Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof of* the royal palace of Babylon.
- 30 The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’
- 31 While the word *was* in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you,

32 and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’

33 Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.

Nebuchadnezzar Worships God

34 “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.

35 “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And *among* the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’

36 At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk) Releases Jehoiachin From Prison (March 31, 561 BC)

2 Kings 25:27–30

27 Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh *day* of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he became king,

released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison;
28 and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon.
29 Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes and had his meals in the king’s presence regularly all the days of his life;
30 and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

Jeremiah 52:31–34

31 Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the *first* year of his reign, showed favor to Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison.
32 Then he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the thrones of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon.
33 So Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes, and had his meals in the king’s presence regularly all the days of his life.
34 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, a daily portion all the days of his life until the day of his death.

Chronological Notes

1) A Possible Historical Setting for Daniel 4.¹

- A) There is no chronological information in the text for the setting of the events in Daniel 4. The only thing we are told is that Nebuchadnezzar had his dream when he was at home in his palace and was at ease and flourishing (4:4). Twelve months later he was struck with insanity (4:29–32) and did not occupy the throne for a period of “seven times” (4:16), which is usually interpreted to mean “seven years,” but instead probably refers to a shorter period of complete reformation for the king.²
- B) The parts of the Babylonian Chronicle extant for the reign of Nebuchadnezzar end in his tenth year, which extended from Nisan 595 to the end of Adar II 594 BC.³ The only other records of Nebuchadnezzar’s activity are the siege and fall of Jerusalem (589–587), the thirteen-year siege of Tyre (586–573), and a campaign in Egypt in 568/567 BC to quash a revolt by the regent he had placed in charge of that part of the empire.⁴ Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC. Thus it would appear as if Nebuchadnezzar had his dream sometime between 573 BC and his death in 562 BC. Since he was in Babylon and “at ease” and “flourishing” (4:4) when he had the dream, he was in Babylon twelve months later at the fulfillment of the dream, and he was insane for some period afterwards, Nebuchadnezzar could not have had the dream during the years 570–565, since in 568/567 he was in Egypt and sane enough to lead his troops in battle. Thus Nebuchadnezzar could not have dreamt this dream any earlier than 573 BC nor any later than 560 BC.
- C) From this data we can conclude that there are two possible spans of years for the events of Daniel 4: either 573–569 BC or 564–562 BC. Since there is hardly enough time for all of the events to have taken place in the last two years of his reign, it is most likely that Daniel 4 is set sometime during 573–569. Perhaps the rebellion in Egypt was prompted by Nebuchadnezzar’s return to power; the vassal king in Egypt may have perceived that it was a good time to assert his independence (of which he might have had a taste during Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity). If this was the case, then a date sometime in the late 570s is to be preferred for the events of Daniel 4.

¹ Sourced from Andrew E. Steinmann, “Daniel,” *Concordia Commentary*, (Concordia Publishing House, 2008): 208. The footnotes that follow are also from Steinmann.

² For the meaning of the phrase, see Steinmann, 236–37. The phrase is also used in 4:23, 25, 32.

³ BM 21946 (Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 72–75).

⁴ See Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, or Weisberg, *Texts from the Time of Nebuchadnezzar*.