

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

Daniel 4

The King's Proclamation

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king to all of the nations, the peoples and languages that live in the whole earth: "May your prosperity increase!

2 It is pleasing to me to recount the signs and wonders that the Most High God worked for me.

3 How great *are* his signs and wonders, how strong *is* his kingdom, an everlasting kingdom; and his sovereignty is from generation to generation.

The King's Dream

4 "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was content in my house and prospering in my palace.

5 And I saw a dream and a revelation on my bed and it frightened me, and the visions of my head terrified me.

6 And a decree was sent out, *ordering that all the wise men of Babylon were* to be brought in before me so that they may make known to me *the* explanation of the dream.

7 Then the magicians, the conjurers, the astrologers and the diviners came in and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its explanation.

8 Then at last Daniel came before me whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, *and* in whom was the spirit of the holy gods, and I related the dream to him.

9 " 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I myself know that *the* spirit of *the* holy gods *is* in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. *Now tell me the* visions of my dream that I saw, and its explanation.

10 Now *these were* the visions of my head *as I was lying* on my bed: I was gazing and, look, a tree *was* in the midst of the earth, and its height *was* exalted.

11 The tree grew and it became strong,
and its height reached to heaven,
and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

12 Its foliage *was* beautiful,
and its fruit abundant,
and in it *was* provision for all.
Under it the animals of the field sought shade,
and in its branches the birds of heaven nested,
and from it all the living beings were fed.

13 " 'I was looking in the vision of my head *as I lay* on my bed, and look, a watcher, and a holy *one*, came down from heaven.

14 He cried aloud and so he said:

"Cut down the tree and chop off its branches;
shake off its foliage and scatter its fruit.
Let the animals flee from under it,
and the birds from its branches.

15 But the stump of its roots
leave in the earth,
along with a band of iron and bronze;
leave it in the grass of the field.
And in the dew of heaven
let it be watered,
and with the animals
let his lot *be* in *the* grass of the earth.

16 Let his mind be changed from *that of a* human,
and let *the* mind of an animal be given to him,
and let seven times pass over him.

17 The sentence *is* by *the* decree of *the* watchers,
and the decision *by the* command of *the* holy *ones*,
in order that the living will know
that the Most High *is* sovereign over *the* kingdom of humankind,
and to whomever he wills he gives it,
and he *even* sets *the* humblest of men over it."

18 “This *is* the dream *that* I, Nebuchadnezzar the king, saw. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its explanation, for all of *the* wise men of my kingdom were not able to make the explanation known to me, but you are able because *the* spirit of holy gods *is* in you.’

The Interpretation of the Dream

19 “Then Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, was distressed for some time, and his thoughts disturbed him. The king answered and he said, ‘Belteshazzar, let the dream and its explanation not disturb you.’ Belteshazzar answered and said, ‘My lord, *may* the dream and its explanation *be* for *those who* hate you and for your enemies.

20 The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong and its height reached to heaven and it was visible to the end of the whole earth,

21 and its foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, and *so there was* provision for all in it, *and* the animals of the field lived under it and in its branches nest *the* birds of heaven,

22 —it is you, O king, who have grown *great* and you have grown strong, and *so* your greatness has increased and it has reached to heaven and your sovereignty to the end of the earth.

23 And *inasmuch* that the king saw *the* watcher, a holy *one* coming down from heaven and he said, “Cut down the tree and destroy it, but the stump of its root in the earth leave with a band of iron and bronze in the grass of the field, and let it be watered with the dew of heaven and *let* his lot *be* with *the* animals of the field until seven times have passed over him.”

24 This *is* the explanation, O king, and it *is* a decree of the Most High that has come upon my lord the king:

25 you will be driven away from human society and you will dwell with the animals of the field, and you will be caused to graze grass like the oxen yourself, and you will be watered with the dew of heaven, and seven *periods of* time will pass over you until that you have acknowledged that the Most High *is* sovereign over the kingdom of humankind, and to whom he wills he gives it.

26 And in that they said to leave alone the stump of the tree’s root, so your kingdom *will be* restored for you when you acknowledge that heaven *is* sovereign.

27 Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable *to you* and your sin remove with righteousness and your iniquity with having mercy on *the* oppressed, in case there might be a prolongation of your prosperity.”

The Fulfillment of the Dream

28 All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

29 At the end of twelve months he was walking on the *roof of* the royal palace of Babylon.

30 And the king answered and said, “Is this not the great Babylon which I have built as a royal palace by the strength of my own power, and for the glory of my own majesty?”

31 *While* the words *were* still in the mouth of the king, a voice from heaven came, *saying*, ‘To you, King Nebuchadnezzar, *it is* declared that the kingdom has departed from you,

32 and you will be driven away from human society and your dwelling *will be* with the animals of the field and they will cause you to graze *the* grass like oxen, and seven times will pass over you, until you acknowledge that the Most High *is* sovereign over the kingdom of humankind and that he gives it to whom he wills.’

33 Immediately the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar, and he was expelled from human society and he ate grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven until his hair *was* like *the hair of* an eagle and his nails grew like *a bird’s* claws.

Nebuchadnezzar Worships God

34 “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and *then* my reason returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and the one who lives forever I praised and I honored.

“For his sovereignty *is* an everlasting sovereignty,
and his kingdom *continues* from generation to generation.

35 And all the dwellers of the earth
are regarded as nothing,
and he does according to his desire
in the host of heaven and *among* the dwellers of earth,
and there is not *one* who can hold back his hand,
or ask him, ‘What are you doing?’

36 “At that time my reason returned to me, and *also* the glory of my kingdom and my majesty and splendor returned to me, and my advisers and my lords searched *me* out, and I was established over my kingdom and abundant greatness was added to me.

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honor the king of heaven, for all his works *are* truth, and his ways *are* justice and that 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 It happened in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month on the twenty-seventh of the month, Evil-Merodach king of Babylon in the year that he became king, lifted the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah from the house of imprisonment.
 28 He spoke kindly to him, and he gave him a better seat than the seat of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon.
 29 So he changed the clothes of his imprisonment, and he ate food continually in his presence all the days of his life.
 30 His allowance was continually given to him from the king, a portion every day all the days of his life.

Jeremiah 52:31–34

31 And then in *the* thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, in *the* twelfth month, on *the* twenty-fifth *day* of the month, Evil-Merodach, the king of Babylon, in the *first* year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, and brought him out from prison.
 32 Then he spoke with him kindly and gave his seat above the seats of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon.
 33 So he changed the garments of his imprisonment and he ate food before him continually all the days of his life.
 34 And his allowance, a continual allowance was given to him by the king of Babylon on a daily basis all the days of his life up to the day of his death.

Daniel's Vision of Future World History (553n BC)

Daniel 7

Setting of the Vision

1 In the first year of Belshazzar the king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head *as he lay* on his bed; then he wrote down the dream *and the* summary of *the* words as follows:

The Four Beasts

2 Daniel explained and said, "I was looking in my vision in the night, and look, the four winds of heaven were stirring *up* the great sea.
 3 And four great beasts *were* coming up from the sea, differing from one another.
 4 The first *was* like *a* lion and had *the* wings of an eagle. I was watching until its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth and it was raised on *its* feet like a human, and a human heart was given to it.
 5 And look, another beast, a second one, looking like a bear. And it was raised up on one side and three tusks *were* in its mouth between its teeth, and so it was told, "Arise, eat much flesh!"
 6 After this I was watching and look, another *beast* like a leopard; it had four wings of a bird on its back, and the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.
 7 After this in the visions of the night I was looking and there was a fourth beast, terrifying and frightful and exceedingly strong, and it had great iron teeth, *and it was* devouring and crushing, and it stamped the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all *the other* beasts that preceded it and it had ten horns.

The Little Horn

8 I was considering the horns, and look, another little horn came up among them, and three of the earlier horns were rooted out from before it, and there were eyes like the eyes of *a* human in this horn and *also* a mouth *that was* speaking boastfully.

The Destruction of the Fourth Beast

9 "I continued watching until thrones were placed and an Ancient of Days sat; his clothing *was* like white snow and the hair of his head *was* like pure wool and his throne *was* a flame of fire and its wheels *were* burning fire.
 10 A stream of fire issued forth and flowed from his presence; thousands *upon* thousands served him and ten thousand *upon* ten thousand stood before him. The judge sat, and *the* books were opened.
 11 "I continued watching then because of the noise of the boastful words of the horn *who was* speaking; I continued watching until the beast was slain and its body was destroyed, and it was given *over* to burning with fire.
 12 And *as for* the remainder of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but a prolongation of their life was given to them for a season and a time.

The Kingdom of Christ

13 "I continued watching in the visions of the night, and look, with the clouds of heaven *one* like a son of man was coming, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. [\[Matt 16:27; 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev 1:7\]](#)
 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all the peoples, the nations, and languages *would* serve him; his dominion *is* a dominion without end that will not cease, and his kingdom *is one* that will not be destroyed.

The Interpretation of the Vision

15 "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me.

16 So I approached one of the attendants and I asked him *about* the truth concerning all this; and he told me *that* he would make known to me the explanation of the matter.

17 ‘These great beasts which are four *in number are* four kings *who* will arise from the earth.

18 But the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom, and they will take possession of the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

19 “Then I desired to make certain concerning the fourth beast that was different from all the others—exceedingly terrifying, with its iron teeth and its claws of bronze; it devoured and crushed *and* stamped the remainder with its feet—

20 and concerning the horns that *were* on its head, and *concerning the other horn* that came up and before which three horns fell, and this horn had eyes and *a* mouth speaking boastfully, and its appearance *was* larger than its companions.

21 I continued watching, and this horn made war with *the* holy ones and it prevailed over them,

22 until the Ancient of Days came and gave judgment to *the* holy ones of the Most High; and the time arrived and *the* holy ones took possession of the kingdom.

23 “And he said, ‘The fourth beast *is* the fourth kingdom *that* will be on the earth that will be different from all the *other* kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and it will trample it and it will crush it.

24 And *as for* the ten horns *coming* from it, *from* this kingdom ten kings will arise, and another will arise after them. And he will be different from the earlier *ones*, and he will subdue three kings.

25 And he will speak words against the Most High, and he will wear out *the* holy ones of the Most High, and he will attempt to change times and law, and they will be given into his hand for a time and two times and half a time.

26 Then the court will sit, and his dominion will be removed, to be eradicated and to be destroyed totally.

27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to *the* nation of *the* holy ones of the Most High; his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him.’

28 This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel—my thoughts terrified me greatly and my face changed over me, but I kept the matter in my heart.”

Daniel’s Vision of the Ram and the Goat (551n BC)

Daniel 8

Setting of the Vision

1 In the third year *of* the kingdom of Belshazzar the king, a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that appeared to me previously.

2 And I saw in the vision, and when I saw, I *was* in Susa, the citadel that *was* in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I myself was at the stream of Ulai.

The Ram (Media/Persia)

3 And I lifted up my eyes and I saw, and look! A ram standing before the stream, and it had two horns, and the horns *were* long, but the one *was* longer than the second, and the longer *one* came up after the other one.

4 I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward, and none of the beasts stood before it, and there was no rescuing from its power, and it did what it wanted and it became strong.

The Goat (Greece)

5 And I was considering *this*, and look, a he-goat coming from the west across the face of the whole earth, and *it* was not touching the ground; and the he-goat *had* a conspicuous horn between its eyes.

6 Then it came toward the ram that had the two horns that I saw standing before the stream, and it ran at it with the rage of its power.

7 And I saw it approaching the ram and it was furious at it, and it struck the ram, and it broke its two horns, and there was not strength in the ram to stand before him, and he threw it down to the ground and trampled it, and there was no one who could rescue the ram from its power.

8 And the he-goat grew exceedingly great, and at the height of its power the great horn was broken, and four conspicuous horns came up in place of it toward the four winds of heaven.

The Little Horn (Antiochus IV Epiphanes)

9 And from one of them came forth *a* horn, a little one, and it grew exceedingly toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the beautiful land.

10 And it grew up to the host of heaven, and it threw down to the ground some of the host and some of the stars and trampled them.

11 Even against the prince of the hosts it acted arrogantly and took away from him the regular burnt offering, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.

12 And on account of transgression, *the* host was given over *to the horn* in addition to the regular burnt offering. And it cast down

truth to the ground, and it acted, and it had success.

13 And I heard a certain holy one speaking, and a certain other holy one said to the specific one who was speaking, “For how long is the vision *concerning* the regular burnt offering, and the transgression *that* makes desolate, and *the* giving over of the sanctuary and *the* host to trampling?”

14 And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then *the* sanctuary will be restored.”

Gabriel Sent to Interpret the Vision

15 And then when I, Daniel, saw the vision, and I was seeking understanding, there was *one* standing before me with *the* appearance of a man.

16 And I heard *the* voice of a human at *the* Ulai, and he called and said, “Gabriel, *make* this *man* understand the vision.”

17 And he came beside where I was standing, and when he came I became terrified and I fell prostrate on my face. And he said to me, “Understand, son of man, that the vision *is* for *the* time of *the* end.”

18 And when he spoke with me I fell into a trance with my face to the ground, and he touched me and made me stand on by feet.

The Interpretation of the Vision

19 And he said, “Look, I am making known to you what will happen in the period of wrath, for *it* refers to *the* appointed time of *the* end.

20 “The ram that you saw who had two horns *represents* the kings of Media and Persia.

21 “And the hairy he-goat *is* the kingdom of Greece, and the great horn that *is* between his eyes—he *is* the first king.

22 And the *horn* that was broken, and *then* there arose four *horns* in place of it—*these* are four kingdoms that will arise from *his* nation, but not with his power.

23 And at the end of their kingdom, when the transgressions are completed, a king will arise, fierce in countenance and skilled in riddles.

24 And his power will grow, but not by his *own* power, and he will cause fearful destruction, and he will succeed and he will act, and he will destroy *the* mighty and *the* people of *the* holy ones.

25 And by his planning he will make a success of deceit by his hand, and in his mind he will boast, and in *their* ease he will destroy many, and *even* against *the* prince of princes he will rise up, and he will be broken, *but* not by human hands.

26 And the vision of the evening and the morning that has been described, it *is* true; and you, seal *up* the vision, for it refers to many days to come.”

27 And I, Daniel, was overcome, and I became ill for *some* days, and I performed the business of the king, and I was dismayed over the vision and I did not understand it.

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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”

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*.

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.