

## 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.

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

Daniel 7

#### Setting of the Vision

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind *as he lay* on his bed; then he wrote the dream down *and* related the *following* summary of it.

#### The Four Beasts

2 Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

3 And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.

4 The first *was* like a lion and had *the* wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

5 And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs *were* in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'

6 After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

7 After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

#### The Little Horn

8 While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering *great boasts*.

#### The Destruction of the Fourth Beast

9 "I kept looking  
Until thrones were set up,  
And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat;  
His vesture *was* like white snow  
And the hair of His head like pure wool.  
His throne *was* ablaze with flames,  
Its wheels *were* a burning fire.

10 "A river of fire was flowing  
And coming out from before Him;  
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,  
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;  
The court sat,  
And the books were opened.

11 Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.

12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

**The Kingdom of Christ**

- 13 “I kept looking in the night visions,  
And behold, with the clouds of heaven  
One like a Son of Man was coming,  
And He came up 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,  
Glory and a kingdom,  
That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language  
Might serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
Which will not pass away;  
And His kingdom is one  
Which will not be destroyed.

**The Interpretation of the Vision**

- 15 “As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.  
16 I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things:  
17 ‘These great beasts, which are four *in number*, are four kings *who* will arise from the earth.  
18 But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.’  
19 “Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet,  
20 and *the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three *of them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts* and which was larger in appearance than its associates.  
21 I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them  
22 until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.  
23 “Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.  
24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.  
25 He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.  
26 But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.  
27 Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.’  
28 “At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

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

## Daniel 8

**Setting of the Vision**

- 1 In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously.  
2 I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal.

**The Ram (Media/Persia)**

- 3 Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns *were* long, but one *was* longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last.  
4 I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no *other* beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified *himself*.

**The Goat (Greece)**

- 5 While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes.

6 He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath.

7 I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power.

8 Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven.

#### **The Little Horn (Antiochus IV Epiphanes)**

9 Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land*.

10 It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down.

11 It even magnified *itself* to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down.

12 And on account of transgression the host will be given over *to the horn* along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform *its will* and prosper.

13 Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?"

14 He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings *and* mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored."

#### **Gabriel Sent to Interpret the Vision**

15 When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man.

16 And I heard the voice of a man between *the banks of Uлай*, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this *man* an understanding of the vision."

17 So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end."

18 Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright.

#### **The Interpretation of the Vision**

19 He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for *it* pertains to the appointed time of the end.

20 The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia.

21 The shaggy goat *represents* the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king.

22 The broken *horn* and the four *horns that* arose in its place *represent* four kingdoms *which* will arise from *his* nation, although not with his power.

23 "In the latter period of their rule,  
When the transgressors have run *their course*,  
A king will arise,  
Insolent and skilled in intrigue.

24 "His power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power,  
And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree  
And prosper and perform *his will*;  
He will destroy mighty men and the holy people.

25 "And through his shrewdness  
He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence;  
And he will magnify *himself* in his heart,  
And he will destroy many while *they are* at ease.  
He will even oppose the Prince of princes,  
But he will be broken without human agency.

26 "The vision of the evenings and mornings  
Which has been told is true;  
But keep the vision secret,  
For *it* pertains to many days *in the future*."

27 Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up *again* and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.

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### Chronological Notes

#### 1) A Possible Historical Setting for Daniel 4.<sup>1</sup>

- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

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

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

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