

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

Daniel 4

The King's Proclamation

1 “King Nebuchadnezzar, to all peoples, nations, and language groups that live in all the land: Peace and prosperity!
2 I am delighted to tell you about the signs and wonders that the most high God has done for me.

3 “How great are his signs!
How mighty are his wonders!
His kingdom will last forever,
and his authority continues from one generation to the next.”

The King's Dream

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was relaxing in my home, living luxuriously in my palace.
5 I saw a dream that frightened me badly. The things I imagined while lying on my bed—these visions of my mind—were terrifying me.
6 So I issued an order for all the wise men of Babylon to be brought before me so that they could make known to me the interpretation of the dream.
7 When the magicians, astrologers, wise men, and diviners entered, I recounted the dream for them. But they were unable to make known its interpretation to me.
8 Later Daniel entered (whose name is Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom there is a spirit of the holy gods). I recounted the dream for him as well,
9 saying, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, in whom I know there to be a spirit of the holy gods and whom no mystery baffles, consider my dream that I saw and set forth its interpretation!
10 Here are the visions of my mind while I was on my bed.

While I was watching,
there was a tree in the middle of the land.
It was enormously tall.

11 The tree grew large and strong.
Its top reached far into the sky;
it could be seen from the borders of all the land.
12 Its foliage was attractive and its fruit plentiful;
on it there was food enough for all.
Under it the wild animals used to seek shade,
and in its branches the birds of the sky used to nest.
All creatures used to feed themselves from it.
13 While I was watching in my mind's visions on my bed,
a holy sentinel came down from heaven.
14 He called out loudly as follows:
'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches!
Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit!
Let the animals flee from under it
and the birds from its branches!
15 But leave its taproot in the ground,
with a band of iron and bronze around it
surrounded by the grass of the field.
Let it become damp with the dew of the sky,
and let it live with the animals in the grass of the land.
16 Let his mind be altered from that of a human being,
and let an animal's mind be given to him,
and let seven periods of time go by for him.
17 This announcement is by the decree of the sentinels;
this decision is by the pronouncement of the holy ones,
so that those who are alive may understand
that the Most High has authority over human kingdoms,
and he bestows them on whomever he wishes.
He establishes over them even the lowliest of human beings.'

18 “This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, for none of the wise men in my kingdom are able to make known to me the interpretation. But you can do so, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

The Interpretation of the Dream

19 Then Daniel (whose name is also Belteshazzar) was upset for a brief time; his thoughts were alarming him. The king said, “Belteshazzar, don’t let the dream and its interpretation alarm you.” But Belteshazzar replied, “Sir, if only the dream were for your enemies and its interpretation applied to your adversaries!

20 The tree that you saw that grew large and strong, whose top reached to the sky, and which could be seen in all the land,

21 whose foliage was attractive and its fruit plentiful, and from which there was food available for all, under whose branches wild animals used to live, and in whose branches birds of the sky used to nest—

22 it is you, O king! For you have become great and strong. Your greatness is such that it reaches to heaven, and your authority to the ends of the earth.

23 As for the king seeing a holy sentinel coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its taproot in the ground, with a band of iron and bronze around it, surrounded by the grass of the field. Let it become damp with the dew of the sky, and let it live with the wild animals, until seven periods of time go by for him’—

24 this is the interpretation, O king! It is the decision of the Most High that this has happened to my lord the king.

25 You will be driven from human society, and you will live with the wild animals. You will be fed grass like oxen, and you will become damp with the dew of the sky. Seven periods of time will pass by for you, before you understand that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms and gives them to whomever he wishes.

26 They said to leave the taproot of the tree, for your kingdom will be restored to you when you come to understand that heaven rules.

27 Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you. Break away from your sins by doing what is right, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps your prosperity will be prolonged.”

The Fulfillment of the Dream

28 Now all of this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

29 After twelve months, he happened to be walking around on the battlements of the royal palace of Babylon.

30 The king uttered these words: “Is this not the great Babylon that I have built for a royal residence by my own mighty strength and for my majestic honor?”

31 While these words were still on the king’s lips, a voice came down from heaven: “It is hereby announced to you, King Nebuchadnezzar, that your kingdom has been removed from you!

32 You will be driven from human society, and you will live with the wild animals. You will be fed grass like oxen, and seven periods of time will pass by for you before you understand that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms and gives them to whomever he wishes.”

33 Now in that very moment this pronouncement about Nebuchadnezzar came true. He was driven from human society, he ate grass like oxen, and his body became damp with the dew of the sky, until his hair became long like an eagle’s feathers, and his nails like a bird’s claws.

Nebuchadnezzar Worships God

34 But at the end of the appointed time I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven, and my sanity returned to me.

I extolled the Most High,
and I praised and glorified the one who lives forever.
For his authority is an everlasting authority,
and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next.

35 All the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing.
He does as he wishes with the army of heaven
and with those who inhabit the earth.
No one slaps his hand
and says to him, ‘What have you done?’

36 At that time my sanity returned to me. I was restored to the honor of my kingdom, and my splendor returned to me. My ministers and my nobles were seeking me out, and I was reinstated over my kingdom. I became even greater than before.

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for all his deeds are right and his ways are just. He is able to bring down those who live in pride.

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

2 Kings 25:27–30

27 In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month, King Evil-Merodach of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, pardoned King Jehoiachin of Judah and released him from prison.

28 He spoke kindly to him and gave him a more prestigious position than the other kings who were with him in Babylon.

29 Jehoiachin took off his prison clothes and ate daily in the king's presence for the rest of his life.

30 He was given daily provisions by the king for the rest of his life until the day he died.

Jeremiah 52:31–34

31 In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, Evil-Merodach, in the first year of his reign, pardoned King Jehoiachin of Judah and released him from prison.

32 He spoke kindly to him and gave him a more prestigious position than the other kings who were with him in Babylon.

33 Jehoiachin took off his prison clothes and ate daily in the king's presence for the rest of his life.

34 He was given daily provisions by the king of Babylon for the rest of his life until the day he died.

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

Daniel 7

Setting of the Vision

1 In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream filled with visions while he was lying on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream in summary fashion.

The Four Beasts

2 Daniel explained: "I was watching in my vision during the night as the four winds of the sky were stirring up the great sea.

3 Then four large beasts came up from the sea; they were different from one another.

4 "The first one was like a lion with eagles' wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off and it was lifted up from the ground. It was made to stand on two feet like a human being, and a human mind was given to it.

5 "Then a second beast appeared, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and there were three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and devour much flesh!'

6 "After these things, as I was watching, another beast like a leopard appeared, with four bird-like wings on its back. This beast had four heads, and ruling authority was given to it.

7 "After these things, as I was watching in the night visions a fourth beast appeared—one dreadful, terrible, and very strong. It had two large rows of iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and anything that was left it trampled with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that came before it, and it had ten horns.

The Little Horn

8 "As I was contemplating the horns, another horn—a small one—came up between them, and three of the former horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This horn had eyes resembling human eyes and a mouth speaking arrogant things.

The Destruction of the Fourth Beast

9 "While I was watching, thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His attire was white like snow; the hair of his head was like lamb's wool. His throne was ablaze with fire and its wheels were all aflame.

10 A river of fire was streaming forth and proceeding from his presence. Many thousands were ministering to him; Many tens of thousands stood ready to serve him. The court convened and the books were opened.

11 "Then I kept on watching because of the arrogant words of the horn that was speaking. I was watching until the beast was killed and its body destroyed and thrown into the flaming fire.

12 As for the rest of the beasts, their ruling authority had already been removed, though they were permitted to go on living for a time and a season.

The Kingdom of Christ

13 I was watching in the night visions, "And with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man was approaching. He went up to the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. [[Matt 16:27](#); [24:30](#); [26:64](#); [Mark 13:26](#); [14:62](#); [Luke 21:27](#); [Rev 1:7](#)]

14 To him was given ruling authority, honor, and sovereignty. All peoples, nations, and language groups were serving him. His authority is eternal and will not pass away. His kingdom will not be destroyed.

The Interpretation of the Vision

15 "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed, and the visions of my mind were alarming me.

16 I approached one of those standing nearby and asked him about the meaning of all this. So he spoke with me and revealed to me the interpretation of the vision:

17 'These large beasts, which are four in number, represent four kings who will arise from the earth.
 18 The holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will take possession of the kingdom forever and ever.'
 19 "Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others. It was very dreadful, with two rows of iron teeth and bronze claws, and it devoured, crushed, and trampled anything that was left with its feet.
 20 I also wanted to know the meaning of the ten horns on its head, and of that other horn which came up and before which three others fell. This was the horn that had eyes and a mouth speaking arrogant things, whose appearance was more formidable than the others.
 21 While I was watching, that horn began to wage war against the holy ones and was defeating them,
 22 until the Ancient of Days arrived and judgment was rendered in favor of the holy ones of the Most High. Then the time came for the holy ones to take possession of the kingdom.
 23 "This is what he told me: 'The fourth beast means that there will be a fourth kingdom on earth that will differ from all the other kingdoms. It will devour all the earth and will trample and crush it.
 24 The ten horns mean that ten kings will arise from that kingdom. Another king will arise after them, but he will be different from the earlier ones. He will humiliate three kings.
 25 He will speak words against the Most High. He will harass the holy ones of the Most High continually. His intention will be to change times established by law. They will be delivered into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.
 26 But the court will convene, and his ruling authority will be removed—destroyed and abolished forever!
 27 Then the kingdom, authority, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be delivered to the people of the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; all authorities will serve him and obey him.'
 28 "This is the conclusion of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts troubled me greatly, and the color drained from my face. 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 King Belshazzar's reign, a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that had appeared to me previously.
 2 In this vision I saw myself in Susa the citadel, which is located in the province of Elam. In the vision I saw myself at the Ulai Canal.

The Ram (Media/Persia)

3 I looked up and saw a ram with two horns standing at the canal. Its two horns were both long, but one was longer than the other. The longer one was coming up after the shorter one.
 4 I saw that the ram was butting westward, northward, and southward. No animal was able to stand before it, and there was none who could deliver from its power. It did as it pleased and acted arrogantly.

The Goat (Greece)

5 While I was contemplating all this, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of all the land without touching the ground. This goat had a conspicuous horn between its eyes.
 6 It came to the two-horned ram that I had seen standing beside the canal and rushed against it with raging strength.
 7 I saw it approaching the ram. It went into a fit of rage against the ram and struck it and broke off its two horns. The ram had no ability to resist it. The goat hurled the ram to the ground and trampled it. No one could deliver the ram from its power.
 8 The male goat acted even more arrogantly. But no sooner had the large horn become strong than it was broken, and there arose four conspicuous horns in its place, extending toward the four winds of the sky.

The Little Horn (Antiochus IV Epiphanes)

9 From one of them came a small horn. But it grew to be very big, toward the south and the east and toward the beautiful land.
 10 It grew so big it reached the army of heaven, and it brought about the fall of some of the army and some of the stars to the ground, where it trampled them.
 11 It also acted arrogantly against the Prince of the army, from whom the daily sacrifice was removed and whose sanctuary was thrown down.
 12 The army was given over, along with the daily sacrifice, in the course of his sinful rebellion. It hurled truth to the ground and enjoyed success.
 13 Then I heard a holy one speaking. Another holy one said to the one who was speaking, "To what period of time does the vision pertain—this vision concerning the daily sacrifice and the destructive act of rebellion and the giving over of both the sanctuary and army to be trampled?"
 14 He said to me, "To 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be put right again."

Gabriel Sent to Interpret the Vision

15 While I, Daniel, was watching the vision, I sought to understand it. Now one who appeared to be a man was standing before me.
 16 Then I heard a human voice coming from between the banks of the Ulai. It called out, “Gabriel, enable this person to understand the vision.”

17 So he approached the place where I was standing. As he came, I felt terrified and fell flat on the ground. Then he said to me, “Understand, son of man, that the vision pertains to the time of the end.”

18 As he spoke with me, I fell into a trance with my face to the ground. But he touched me and stood me upright.

The Interpretation of the Vision

19 Then he said, “I am going to inform you about what will happen in the latter time of wrath, for the vision pertains to the appointed time of the end.

20 The ram that you saw with the two horns stands for the kings of Media and Persia.

21 The male goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king.

22 The horn that was broken and in whose place there arose four others stands for four kingdoms that will arise from his nation, though they will not have his strength.

23 Toward the end of their rule, when rebellious acts are complete, a rash and deceitful king will arise.

24 His power will be great, but it will not be by his strength alone. He will cause terrible destruction. He will be successful in what he undertakes. He will destroy powerful people and the people of the holy ones.

25 By his treachery he will succeed through deceit. He will have an arrogant attitude, and he will destroy many who are unaware of his schemes. He will rise up against the Prince of princes, yet he will be broken apart—but not by human agency.

26 The vision of the evenings and mornings that was told to you is correct. But you should seal up the vision, for it refers to a time many days from now.”

27 I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up and again carried out the king’s business. But I was astonished at the vision, and there was no one to explain it.

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Chronological Notes1) 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

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*.

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.