

# Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Punishment

by John F. Walvoord

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*The sermon explores Nebuchadnezzar's journey from pride to humility through God's sovereign intervention.*

**Scripture:** Daniel 4:4-37

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Humility Before God"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the profound story of Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual journey in Daniel 4, highlighting the king's recognition of the sovereignty of God after experiencing a period of insanity. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a tree being cut down symbolizes his fall from pride and subsequent restoration by God, leading to his acknowledgment of God's eternal dominion and power over all. The chapter serves as a powerful illustration of God's ability to humble the proud and exalt the humble, showcasing Nebuchadnezzar's transformation from a pagan ruler to a worshipper of the King of heaven.

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## Transcript

This chapter which occupies such a large portion of the book of Daniel is more than a profound story of how God can bring a proud man low. Undoubtedly, it is the climax of Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual biography which began with his recognition of the excellence of Daniel and his companions, continued with the interpretation of the dream of the image in chapter 2, and was advanced further by his experience with Daniel's three companions.

In the background of this account is the obvious concern of Daniel the prophet for the man whom he had served for so many years. Daniel, a man of prayer, undoubtedly prayed for Nebuchadnezzar and eagerly sought some evidence of God's working in his heart. While the experience of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 was not what Daniel had anticipated, the outcome must have approximated Daniel's fondest hope. Although some like Leupold, after Calvin, "doubt whether the king's experience led to his conversion,"<sup>210</sup> it may well be that this chapter brings Nebuchadnezzar to the place where he puts his trust in the God of Daniel. Even merely as a lesson in the spiritual progress of a man in the hands of God, this chapter is a literary gem.

In the light of Daniel's revelation of the broad scope of Gentile power beginning in chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar's experience seems to take on the larger meaning of the humbling of Gentile power by God and the bringing of the world into submission to Himself. In the light of other passages in the Bible speaking prophetically of Babylon and its ultimate overthrow, of which Isaiah 13 and 14 may be taken as an example, it becomes clear that the contest between God and Nebuchadnezzar is a broad illustration of

God's dealings with the entire human race and especially the Gentile world in its creaturely pride and failure to recognize the sovereignty of God. The theme of the chapter, as given by Daniel himself in the interpretation of the king's dream, is God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar "till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan 4:25). Not only is the sovereignty of God demonstrated, but the bankruptcy of Babylonian wisdom forms another motif. It is obviously by design that this chapter precedes the downfall of Babylon itself which follows in chapter 5. To push this to the extreme of making it a particular application to Antiochus Epiphanes in the effort to support a late date of Daniel is, however, without justification. There is nothing whatever to link this passage to the second century B.C. In fact, it is far more applicable to that fateful night in October 539 b.c. when Babylon fell as recorded in Daniel 5.

The content of the chapter is in the form of a decree recording his dream, Daniel's interpretation, and Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent experience. Whether written by Nebuchadnezzar himself, or more probably by one of his scribes at his dictation, or possibly by Daniel himself at the king's direction, the inclusion of it here in Daniel is by divine inspiration. Although critics have imagined a series of incredible objections to accepting this chapter as authentic and reasonably accurate, the narrative actually reads very sensibly and the objections seem trivial and unsupported.<sup>211 212</sup>

Those who reject chapter 4 of Daniel without exception assume that the account is not inspired of the Holy Spirit, that an experience like Nebuchadnezzar's is essentially incredible, and that it is a myth rather than an authentic historical record. Such objections obviously assume that higher criticism is right in declaring Daniel a forgery of the second century B.C. This conclusion is now subject to question not only because of the fallacious reasoning which supports it, but because it is now challenged by the documentary evidence in the Qumran text of Daniel, which on the basis of the critics' own criteria would require Daniel to be much older than the second century b.c. (see Introduction). Conservative scholarship has united in declaring this chapter a genuine portion of the Word of God, equally inspired with other sections of Daniel.

#### Introduction of Nebuchadnezzar's Proclamation

4:1-3 Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 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.

Although it is clear that the opening verses are an introduction to the decree of Nebuchadnezzar, various versions differ in their versification, with the Massoretic beginning the decree at the close of chapter 3. The Septuagint rendering of chapter 4 also differs considerably from the Hebrew-Aramaic text, used for the King James Version translation. Charles summarizes the differences in these words,

In the Massoretic text, which is followed by Theodotion, the Vulgate, and the Peshitto, the entire narrative is given in the form of an edict or letter of Nebuchadnezzar to all his subjects. It begins with a greeting to 'all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth,' and proceeds to state the king's desire to make known to them the signs and wonders that the Most High had wrought upon him (1-3). He then recounts a dream which troubled him, and tells how he summoned the magicians, Chaldeans, and soothsayers to make known its interpretation.<sup>213</sup>

Charles then contrasts this with the Septuagint,

Turning now to the LXX we observe first of all that there is nothing in it corresponding to the first three verses in the Massoretic, which transform the next thirty-four verses into an edict. The chapter begins simply, in the LXX, with the words: 'And in the eighteenth year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar said: I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house': then follows in the same narrative form the next thirty-three verses. At their close comes the edict as a result of the king's spiritual and psychical experiences, in which are embodied very many of the phrases in iv.1-3. A close study of the texts and versions has forced me to the conclusion that the older order of the text is preserved in the LXX and not in the Aramaic. The complete evidence for this conclusion will be found in my larger Commentary.<sup>214</sup>

Although liberal critics generally unite in a low view of this chapter, not only assigning it to a pseudo-Daniel of the second century but finding the text itself suspect, there is insufficient evidence in favor of the Greek translation of the Septuagint. Even Montgomery, who does not regard this as authentic Scripture, rejects the view that the Septuagint is the older text than the present Aramaic text, although he considers the Aramaic also a revision of an earlier text.<sup>215</sup> There is actually little justification for all these variations of unbelief. The chapter on the face of it is credible, albeit a record of supernatural revelation. Generally, those who accept the sixth century date for Daniel also accept this chapter more or less as it is.

The first verse of chapter 4 is the natural form for such a decree, beginning with the name of the sender, the people to whom it is sent, and a general greeting. That it should be sent "unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth" is not out of keeping with the extensive character of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, although he was well aware of the fact that all of the earth's geography was not under his power. It is similar to the extensive decree of Daniel 3:29 which is addressed to "every people, nation, and language." Montgomery is obviously prejudiced in his judgment, "As an edict the document is historically absurd; it has no similar in the history of royal conversions nor in ancient imperial edicts."<sup>216</sup> The folly of this kind of objection is evident in that if Montgomery had found one example in any other literature his criticism would become invalid, but he feels perfectly free to ignore the parallels in chapter 3 and chapter 6 of Daniel. In this case, as is so often true, the critics argue from alleged silence in the records, although admittedly we possess only fragments of ancient literature. This chapter is no more difficult to believe than any other unusual divine revelation.

Although the benediction, "Peace be multiplied unto you," is strikingly similar to some of Paul's greetings in his epistles, it was a common form of expression in the ancient world. A greeting very much like 4:1 is found in Daniel 6:25 where Darius wrote a similar decree with almost the same wording. It is possible that Daniel himself affected the form even if he did not write it as in both places he is in a position of high authority, and the edicts in both cases may have been issued under his particular direction. The decree in any case actually begins with the word peace as that which preceded it was the address.

Nebuchadnezzar then sets the stage for the presentation of his experience by declaring that it was his judgment that the amazing signs and wonders wrought in his life by "the high God" were of such unusual significance that he should share them with his entire realm. The expression signs and wonders is a familiar idiom of Scripture occurring, as Leupold notes, in many passages (Deu 6:22; 7:19; 13:1, 2; 26:8; Neh 9:10; Is 8:18, etc.). Because it is so biblical, it has led to questions by higher critics; but actually there is a great deal of similarity between Babylonian psalms and biblical psalms, and there is nothing technical about this phrase.<sup>217</sup> The expression "the high God" is another evidence that Nebuchadnezzar regards the God of Israel as exalted; but it is not in itself proof that he is a monotheist, trusting only in the true God.

Nebuchadnezzar's exclamation of the greatness of God and His signs and wonders is quite accurate and in keeping with his experience. The signs wrought in his life were indeed great, and God's wonders were indeed mighty. His conclusion that the kingdom is an everlasting kingdom extending from generation to generation is a logical one based on his experience and reveals God in a true light (cf. Ps 145:13).

#### Wise Men Unable to Interpret Dream

4:4-7 I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.

Nebuchadnezzar's account of his experience describes his secure and flourishing situation in his palace prior to the dream. In his early reign he was active in military conquest. Now his vast domains had been made secure, and Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilling his heart's desire by making Babylon one of the most fabulous cities of the ancient world. He was already enjoying his beautiful palace; and at the time of the dream itself he was in bed in his house as indicated in verses 5 and 10. In describing himself as "flourishing in my palace" he used a word meaning "to be green" such as the growth of green leaves on a tree, an evident anticipation of the dream which followed. In this context of security and prosperity surrounded by the monuments of his wealth and power, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which made him afraid. The sequence in verse 5 that he "saw a dream" and had "thoughts upon my bed" as well as "visions of my head" seems to imply that the dream came first, and then upon awakening from the dream which was also a vision his thoughts troubled him. The expression made me afraid is actually much stronger in the original and indicates extreme terror or fright.

As he contemplated the meaning of his experience, he issued a decree to bring all the wise men of Babylon before him to make known its interpretation. As illustrated in chapter 2 this was a standard procedure, and the wise men of Babylon were supposed to be able to interpret mystical experiences. Upon being told the dream, the wise men, described here in their various categories, as also in Daniel 2:2, did not make known to the king the interpretation. It seems that they not only did not make known the interpretation but were unable to do so, as Leupold translates this expression, "but they could not make known to me the interpretation."<sup>218</sup> Even though the dream was adverse and might present a problem in telling Nebuchadnezzar, they probably would have made some attempt to explain it to him, if they had understood it.

#### Daniel Told the King's Dream

4:8-18 But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the

boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; he cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee. For some unexplained reason Daniel was not with the other wise men when the king told his dream. Coming in late, he was immediately addressed personally by Nebuchadnezzar in attempt to have his dream interpreted. Questions have been raised why verse 8 not only calls him Daniel but adds the expression "whose name was Belteshazzar." In view of the fact that this is part of a record where Daniel is prominent, why the double name?

The answer, however, is quite simple. This decree was going throughout the kingdom where most people would know Daniel by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar. The king, in recognition of the fact that Daniel's God is the interpreter of his dream, calls Daniel by his Hebrew name, the last syllable of which refers to Elohim, the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar explains that his name Belteshazzar was given "according to the name of my god," that is, the god Bel. The double name is not unnatural in view of the context and the explanation.

Of Daniel it is said "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods." It is debatable whether gods is singular or plural, as it could be translated either way. Young, with a wealth of evidence from Montgomery, considers it a singular noun and thus a recognition by the king "that the God of Dan. was different from his own gods."<sup>219</sup> This distinction is borne out by the adjective "holy" (4:8, 18; 5:11). The philological evidence supports the singular, although Leupold agrees with Driver that the noun and its adjective are plural and a reflection of the king's polytheism.<sup>220</sup> Driver notes, "The same expression occurs in the Phoenician inscription of Eshmunazar, king of Sidon (3--4 cent. B.C.), lines 9 and 22."<sup>221</sup> The word holy, according to Young, refers to gods who are divine, rather than specifically having moral purity.<sup>222</sup> The ultimate judgment of the expression depends on how well Nebuchadnezzar comprehended the nature of Daniel's God. He obviously had high respect for the God of Daniel and may have had a true faith in the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar, having justified his singling out Daniel of all the wise men, now records in his decree his conversation with Daniel which includes a restatement of his dream.

Daniel, addressed by his heathen name, is further described as the "master of the magicians." This was intended by Nebuchadnezzar to be a compliment in recognition of the genius of Daniel. Having already spoken of his intimate contact with God and the indwelling of the Spirit of God in him, he refers to Daniel's thorough knowledge of the whole field of Babylonian astrology and religion. Leupold suggests that magicians should be translated "scholars" to give the true meaning and avoid the implication of mere magic.<sup>223</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar, on the basis of his previous experience, restates that the Spirit of God is in Daniel and that secrets do not trouble him, that is, he is able to declare their meaning. Of interest is the statement concerning the prince of Tyrus, "Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide

from thee" (Eze 28:3). This statement, which the critics work hard to explain, as it confirms a sixth century Daniel, also supports the idea that Daniel's fame had spread far and wide. By the expression, "tell me the visions of my dream," Nebuchadnezzar obviously meant that Daniel should interpret the dream which the king was now to relate. Verses 10-12 have been regarded as in poetic form if some alteration of the text were permitted, and verses 14-17 are considered free verse also, but with no metrical evenness.<sup>224</sup> Most conservatives ignore this as requiring too much alteration of the text to conform to the poetic pattern. The ideas are poetic, if the form is not.

In his vision, Nebuchadnezzar saw a tree apparently standing somewhat by itself and dominating the view because of its great height. Porteous notes that Bentzen "refers to a building inscription of Nebuchadnezzar in which Babylon is compared to a spreading tree."<sup>225</sup> The use of trees in the Bible for symbolic purposes as well as in extrascriptural narratives is found frequently (cf. 2 Ki 14:9; Ps 1:3; 37:35; 52:8; 92:12; Eze 17). An obvious parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's dream is recorded in Ezekiel 31, where the Assyrian as well as the Egyptian Pharaoh are compared to a cedar of Lebanon. Young states, "Among the commentators Haevernick particularly has illustrated the fondness with which the Orientals depicted the rise and fall of human power by means of the symbol of a tree."<sup>226</sup> In extrabiblical literature, there is the account of Astyages the Mede who had a dream in which a vine grew out of the womb of Mandane his daughter and subsequently covered all Asia. Herodotus interpreted this as referring to Cyrus. Another famous illustration is that of Xerxes, who in a dream was crowned with a branch of an olive tree which extended over the world. According to Haevernick, there are similar allusions in Arabic and Turkish sources.<sup>227</sup> Nebuchadnezzar probably anticipated that the tree represented himself, and this added to his concern.

As Nebuchadnezzar described his dream, the tree was pictured as growing, becoming very strong and very high until it was visible all over the earth, obviously exceeding the possibilities of any ordinary tree. Abundant foliage characterized the tree, and it bore much fruit so that it provided for both beast and fowl and "all flesh fed of it." This obviously included all beasts and fowls. Whether or not it was intended to apply literally to men is open to question, but symbolically it included mankind as under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar.

As Nebuchadnezzar observed the scene, an actor appears in the form of "a watcher and an holy one" who is described as coming "down from heaven." This expression has generated a great deal of comment, especially by liberal critics who consider this a vestige of polytheism. Even Keil says, "The conception... is not biblical, but Babylonian heathen."<sup>228</sup> In the religion of the Babylonians, it was customary to recognize "council deities" who were charged with the special task of watching over the world. The question raised on this passage is whether Nebuchadnezzar uses this heathen concept.

In his detailed note on the subject of watchers, Montgomery refers to the considerable role played by the "watchers" in the intertestamental literature and to a possible occurrence in the Zadokite fragment. He quotes Meinhold as drawing attention in this connection to "the eyes of the Cherubs," in Ezekiel 1:18, and "'the seven, which are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth,' Zech. 4:10," and goes on to trace the still closer parallel with "'the Watchers'" ( *sho,mÿri,m*) and "'the Remembrancers of the Lord'" ( *hammazkiri,m áeth-Yahweh*) of Isaiah 62:6.<sup>229</sup>

In the light of the full revelation of the Word of God, the most natural conclusion is that this person described as "a watcher and an holy one" is an angel sent from God even though the word angel is not used. That angels are watchers, or better translated "vigilant, making a sleepless watch," is not foreign to

the concept of angels in Scripture. The expressions "watchers" and "the holy ones" are mentioned in verse 17 by the messenger himself. Nebuchadnezzar seems to use the term in its heathen connotation as he understood it. He probably would not have understood what was meant by using the term angel in this connection, although he used angel himself in 3:28. The extended discussion of Keil on this point does not clarify the issue too much but probably says all that can be said, even though his conclusions are not entirely satisfactory.<sup>230</sup>

The heavenly messenger cries aloud, literally cries "with might." To the unnamed listeners, he calls for the tree to be cut down, its branches cut off, its leaves to be shaken off, and its fruit to be scattered. The beasts under it and the fowls in its branches were instructed to get away. The record does not say that the command is carried out, but this is implied.

Special instructions, however, are given regarding the stump; and these indicate that the tree will be revived later. The stump is to be bound with a band of iron and brass. The purpose of this is not clear unless in some way it helps preserve it. However, in real life, such a band would not prevent the stump from rotting; and it is probable here that it is symbolic of the madness which would afflict Nebuchadnezzar and hold him symbolically, if not in reality, in chains. The stump is to be surrounded by the tender grass of the field, to be wet with the dew of heaven, and to have its portion with the beasts of the earth. It seems evident that the description goes beyond the symbol of a stump to the actual fulfillment in Nebuchadnezzar's experience. This becomes more clear in verse 16 where the person in view is given a beast's heart instead of a man's heart. This, of course, has no relationship to the characteristics of the stump. The prophecy is concluded with the expression, "let seven times pass over him." This may refer to seven years or merely to a long period of time. Probably the most common interpretation is to consider it seven years as in the Septuagint. It is certain that the period is specific and not more than seven years.

The messenger then concludes that his decree proceeds from "the watchers" and from "the holy ones." The purpose is that people living in the world may recognize the true God described as "the most High" and acknowledge Him as the true ruler of men, who has the power to place "the basest of men" over earthly kingdoms. That God can set up in a position of power the lowliest of men is a common truth of Scripture (see 1 Sa 2:7-8; Job 5:11; Ps 113:7-8; Lk 1:52; and the story of Joseph). This statement is a direct confrontation of Nebuchadnezzar's pride in his own attainments and power.

The major problem of verse 17 is the reference to the watchers and the holy ones who seem to originate the decree. If these are understood as agencies of God, who actually is the source, the problem is alleviated. The verse itself calls our attention to the fact that God as "the most High" is the ultimate sovereign and certainly does not imply that the messengers are in any sense independent of God. The problems created by this text, therefore, are greatly overdrawn by those who see this in conflict with the scriptural doctrine of God.

In concluding his statement concerning the dream, Nebuchadnezzar appeals to Daniel to provide the interpretation. He explains to Daniel that the wise men of Babylon were not able to do this, but he expresses confidence in Daniel, "for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee" (cf. 4:8). The stage is now set for Daniel's interpretation.

#### Daniel Interprets the Dream

4:19-27 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof,

trouble thee. Belshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Keil summarizes the situation facing Daniel with these words, "As Daniel at once understood the interpretation of the dream, he was for a moment so astonished that he could not speak for terror at the thoughts which moved his soul. This amazement seized him because he wished well to the king, and yet he must now announce to him a weighty judgment from God."<sup>231</sup> No doubt, Daniel was not only troubled by the content of the dream but by the need to tell Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation in an appropriate way.

Verse 19 introduces both names of Daniel again, the Hebrew name in recognition that he is acting as a servant of the God of Israel and his Babylonian name by which he was known officially. Daniel's consternation at the interpretation of the dream is indicated in that he "was astonished for one hour," to be understood as being in a state of perplexity for a period of time. An accurate translation would be "was stricken dumb for a while" (ASV), or "was perplexed for a moment."<sup>232</sup> The Revised Standard Version translation, "for a long time," is probably inaccurate. Probably a full sixty minutes would have been too long for him to have remained silent in these circumstances.

Nebuchadnezzar comes to his rescue in this situation and urges him not to let the dream trouble him. The comment reflects his respect for Daniel as a person as well as an interpreter of the dream, and indirectly this is an assurance that Daniel himself need not fear the king regardless of what he reveals.

With this encouragement, Daniel replies with typical oriental courtesy that the dream be to them that hate Nebuchadnezzar and the interpretation to his enemies. Leupold believes that there is an ethical objection to Daniel's sinking to mere flattery in this case and avoiding the real import of the dream. He interprets the statement as meaning that the dream would please the king's enemies.<sup>233</sup> It would seem more natural, however, to have the expression refer to Daniel's wishes in the matter. It is hard to see how the expression in any sense would be flattery. Daniel had a high regard for Nebuchadnezzar and undoubtedly wished the interpretation of the dream could be otherwise than it was.

Having begun his interpretation, he now describes Nebuchadnezzar's dream in detail, restating what the king had already told him. With the facts of the dream before him, he then proceeds to the interpretation in verse 22. Daniel immediately identifies the tree as representing Nebuchadnezzar. Just like the tree in the dream, the king had grown and become strong, had grown great and reached unto heaven with his dominion to the end of the earth. After recapitulating the announced destruction of the tree and the other details which the king already had recited, Daniel proceeds to the detailed interpretation in verse 24. It is significant that he mentions here, "this is the decree of the most High," which is Daniel's interpretation of the expression in verse 17 "the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones." Although Nebuchadnezzar's description did not immediately specify divine agency, it is clear that this is the interpretation according to Daniel in verse 24.

The meaning of the tree being cut down and the attendant circumstances is then defined. Nebuchadnezzar is to be driven from ordinary association with men and will dwell with the beasts of the field. In this condition he will eat grass as the ox and suffer the dew of heaven until he understands that God gives to men the power to rule as He wills. The interpretation of the stump with its bands of iron and brass is that Nebuchadnezzar will retain control of his kingdom and that it will be restored to him after he comes back to his senses. To have had his mind restored without the kingdom would have been a hollow victory. In spite of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar was to know the graciousness of God to him.

The expression, that the heavens do rule, is of particular interest for it is the only time in the Old Testament where the word heaven is substituted for God. This usage became prominent in later literature as in 1 Maccabees and in the New Testament in Matthew where the term kingdom of heaven is similar to kingdom of God. Daniel, in using the expression the heavens do rule, is not accepting the Babylonian deification of heavenly bodies, as he makes clear in 4:25 that "the most High" is a person. He is probably only contrasting divine or heavenly rule to earthly rule such as Nebuchadnezzar exercised, with the implication that Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty was much less than that of "the heavens."

With the interpretation of the dream now clearly presented to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, as a prophet of God, gives a word of solemn exhortation to the king. With utmost courtesy, he urges the king to replace his sins with righteousness and his iniquities with showing mercy to the poor, if perchance God would lengthen the period of his tranquillity. Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly had been morally wicked and cruel to those whom he ruled. His concern had been to build a magnificent city as a monument to his name rather than to alleviating the suffering of the poor. All of this was quite clear to Daniel as it was to God, and the exhortation is faithfully reproduced in this decree going to Nebuchadnezzar's entire realm.

This passage has created some controversy because of a mistranslation in the Vulgate which reads in translation, "Cancel thy sins by deeds of charity and thine iniquities by deeds of kindness to the poor." This, of course, is not what is recorded in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar is not promised forgiveness on the ground of good works or alms to the poor; but rather the issue is that, if he is a wise and benevolent king, he would alleviate the necessity of God's intervening with immediate judgment because of Nebuchadnezzar's pride.<sup>234</sup>

#### The Dream Fulfilled

4:28-33 All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in

the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

Although fulfillment of the dream was not immediate, the decree sums it up concisely, "All this came upon king Nebuchadnezzar." Twelve months later as he walked in the palace in Babylon, one of his crowning architectural triumphs, and looked out upon the great city of Babylon, his pride reached a new peak as he asked the question "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" From the flat roof of the palace, he undoubtedly had a great perspective. This statement contradicts any notion of some critics that he was not actually in Babylon at that time. Everything points to the contrary. What he surveyed was indeed impressive. There are frequent mentions of the great buildings of Babylon in ancient literature.<sup>235</sup>

Montgomery finds this description of Nebuchadnezzar precisely fitting the historical context: "The setting of the scene and the king's self-complaisance in his glorious Babylon are strikingly true to history. Every student of Babylonia recalls these proud words in reading Neb.'s own records of his creation of the new Babylon; for instance (Grotefend Cylinder, KB iii, 2, p. 39): 'Then built I the palace the seat of my royalty ( e,kallu mu,sCEa,b sCEarru,ti,a), the bond of the race of men, the dwelling of joy and rejoicing'; and (East India House Inscr., vii, 34, KB ib., p. 25): In Babylon, my dear city, which I love was the palace, the house of wonder of the people, the bond of the land, the brilliant place, the abode of majesty in Babylon.' The very language of the story is reminiscent of the Akkadian. The glory of Babylon, 'that great city' (Rev. 18), remained long to conjure the imagination of raconteurs. For the city's grandeur as revealed to the eye of the archaeologist we may refer to R. Koldewey, *Das wieder erstehende Babylon*, 1913 (Eng. tr. *Excavations at Babylon*, 1915), with its revelation of Neb.'s palace, the temples, etc."<sup>236</sup>

The building of Babylon was one of Nebuchadnezzar's principal occupations. Inscriptions for about fifty building projects have been found, usually made of brick and sometimes of stone. Among the wonders of Nebuchadnezzar's creation were the gardens of Semiramis, the famous "hanging gardens" regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The gardens were planted on top of a building and served both to beautify and to keep the building cool from the heat of summer. They probably were in view of Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Although his palaces which he constructed were all in Babylon, there were numerous temples built in other cities. The city of Babylon itself, however, was regarded as the symbol of his power and majesty; and he spared no expense or effort to make it the most beautiful city of the world. If the construction of a great city, magnificent in size, architecture, parks, and armaments, was a proper basis for pride, Nebuchadnezzar was justified. What he had forgotten was that none of this would be possible apart from God's sovereign will.

No sooner were the words expressing his pride out of his mouth than he heard a voice from heaven, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee." The voice goes on to state how Nebuchadnezzar will be driven from men and fulfill the prophecy of living the life of a beast until the proper time had been fulfilled and he was willing to recognize the most high God. His transition from sanity to insanity was immediate, and so was the reaction as he was driven from the palace to begin his period of trial. Added in verse 33 is that which had not been previously mentioned--that his hair would

grow like the feathers of an eagle, completely neglected and matted, and his nails would grow like birds' claws. How quickly God can reduce a man at the acme of power and majesty to the level of a beast. The brilliant mind of Nebuchadnezzar, like the kingdom which he ruled, was his only by the sovereign will of God.

Scripture draws a veil over most of the details of Nebuchadnezzar's period of trial. It is probable that Nebuchadnezzar was kept in the palace gardens away from abuse by common people.<sup>237</sup> Although given no care, he was protected; and in his absence his counsellors, possibly led by Daniel himself, continued to operate the kingdom efficiently. Although Scripture does not tell us, it is reasonable to assume that Daniel himself had much to do with the kind treatment and protection of Nebuchadnezzar. He, no doubt, informed the counsellors of what the outcome of the dream would be and that Nebuchadnezzar would return to sanity. In this, God must have inclined the hearts of Nebuchadnezzar's counsellors to cooperate, quite in contrast to what is often the case in ancient governments when at the slightest sign of weakness rulers were cruelly murdered. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been highly respected as a brilliant king by those who worked with him, and this helped set the stage for his recovery.

Although his insanity was supernaturally imposed, it is not to be regarded as much different in its result from what might be expected if it had been produced by natural causes. The form of insanity in which men think of themselves as beasts and imitate the behavior of a beast is not without precedent. Keil designates the malady as *insania zoanthropica*.<sup>238 239</sup>

Young in his treatment of this designates the disease as *Boanthropy*, i.e., he thought himself to be an ox, and cites Pusey as having collected considerable data on the subject. A person in this stage of insanity in his inner consciousness remains somewhat unchanged, but his outer behavior is irrational. Young states, "Pusey adduces the remarkable case of Pere Surin, who believed himself to be possessed, yet maintained communion with God. It is true to fact, then, that Neb., although under the influence of this strange malady, could lift up his eyes unto heaven."<sup>240</sup> In any case, the malady supernaturally imposed by God was supernaturally relieved at the proper time.

Raymond Harrison recites a personal experience with a modern case similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar, which he observed in a British mental institution in 1946. Harrison writes,

A great many doctors spend an entire, busy professional career without once encountering an instance of the kind of monomania described in the book of Daniel. The present writer, therefore, considers himself particularly fortunate to have actually observed a clinical case of boanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946. The patient was in his early 20's, who reportedly had been hospitalized for about five years. His symptoms were well-developed on admission, and diagnosis was immediate and conclusive. He was of average height and weight with good physique, and was in excellent bodily health. His mental symptoms included pronounced anti-social tendencies, and because of this he spent the entire day from dawn to dusk outdoors, in the grounds of the institution ... His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. On observation he was seen to discriminate carefully between grass and weeds, and on inquiry from the attendant the writer was told the diet of this patient consisted exclusively of grass from hospital lawns. He never ate institutional food with the other inmates, and his only drink was water... The writer was able to examine him cursorily, and the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the finger-nails. Without institutional care, the patient would have manifested precisely the same physical

conditions as those mentioned in Daniel 4:33... From the foregoing it seems evident that the author of the fourth chapter of Daniel was describing accurately an attestable, if rather rare, mental affliction.<sup>241</sup>

The experience of Nebuchadnezzar has been compared by liberal critics to the "Prayer of Nabonidus," in Cave IV Document of the Qumran literature. The prayer is introduced as, "The words of the prayer which Nabonidus, King of Assyria and Babylon, the great king, prayed..." The prayer describes Nabonidus as being afflicted with a "dread disease by the decree of the Most High God," which required his segregation at the Arabian oasis of Teima for a period of seven years. An unnamed Jewish seer is said to have advised Nabonidus to repent and give glory to God instead of the idols he formerly worshiped. Because of the parallelism between this account and that of Nebuchadnezzar, liberal scholars who consider the book of Daniel as written in the second century have concluded that the account of Nabonidus is the original account, and that what we have in Daniel 4 is a tradition about it which substituted the name of Nebuchadnezzar for that of Nabonidus. As Frank M. Cross has expressed it,

There is every reason to believe that the new document [the Prayer of Nabonidus] preserves a more primitive form of the tale [Daniel 4]. It is well known that Nabonidus gave over the regency of his realm to his son Belshazzar in order to spend long periods of time in Teima; while Nebuchadnezzar, to judge from extrabiblical data, did not give up his throne. Moreover, in the following legend of Belshazzar's feast, the substitution of Nebuchadnezzar for Nabonidus as the father of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:2) is most suggestive. Evidently in an older stage of tradition, the cycle included the stories of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Dan. 1-3), Nabonidus (Dan. 4), and Belshazzar (Dan. 5).<sup>242</sup>

Conservative scholars, who recognize the genuineness of the book of Daniel as a sixth century b.c. writing, see no conflict in accepting both Daniel 4 as it is written and the "Prayer of Nabonidus" as having some elements of truth, although apocryphal. In fact, as the discussion of Daniel 5 brings out, the fact that Nabonidus lived at Teima for extended periods, well attested in tradition, gives a plausible explanation as to why Belshazzar was in charge in Babylon in Daniel 5. It is not necessary to impugn the record of Daniel in order to recognize the uninspired story relating to Nabonidus.

#### Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration

4:34-37 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Although the previous narrative had been couched in the third person, Nebuchadnezzar now returns to first person narrative. He records how he lifted up his eyes to heaven and his understanding returned. Whether this was simultaneous or causal is not stated, but looking to the heavens possibly was the first step in his recognition of the God of heaven and gaining sane perspective on the total situation. Nebuchadnezzar's immediate reaction was to express praise to God, whom he recognizes as "the most

High." What effect this had on his belief in other deities is not stated, but it at least opens the door to the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar had placed true faith in the God of Israel.

In praising and honoring God, he attributes to Him the quality of living forever, of having an everlasting dominion, and of directing a kingdom which is from generation to generation. These qualities of eternity and sovereignty are far greater than those attributed to Babylonian deities. Because of His sovereignty, God can consider all the inhabitants of the earth as nothing. He is able to do as He wills whether in heaven or in earth, and no one can stay his hand or ask, "What doest thou?" Even as these words of praise were uttered to God, his reason returned to him. No doubt his counsellors had maintained some sort of a watch upon him, and upon the sudden change the report was given. They immediately sought his return to his former position of honor. Apparently the transition was almost immediate, and Nebuchadnezzar was once more established in his kingdom. It is in this role that he is able to issue the decree and make the public confession that is involved.

Nebuchadnezzar concludes with praise and worship for the "King of heaven," whom he describes in conclusion, "all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." Nebuchadnezzar's experience brings the obvious spiritual lesson that even the greatest of earthly sovereigns is completely subject to the sovereign power of God. Montgomery summarizes the chapter concisely, "Neb. holds his fief from Him who is King in heaven and in the kingdom of man."<sup>243</sup>

The debate as to whether Nebuchadnezzar was actually saved in a spiritual sense remains unsettled. Such worthies as Calvin, Hengstenberg, Pusey, and Keil believe the evidence is insufficient.<sup>244</sup> As Young and others point out, however, there is considerable evidence of Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual progress of which chapter 4 is the climax (cf. 2:47; 3:28; 4:34-35). There can be little question that he acknowledges Daniel's God as the omnipotent eternal sovereign of the universe (4:34, 35, 37). His issuance of a decree somewhat humiliating to his pride and an abject recognition of the power of God whom he identifies as "King of heaven" (4:37) would give us some basis for believing that Nebuchadnezzar had a true conversion. Inasmuch as in all ages some men are saved without gaining completely the perspective of faith or being entirely correct in the content of their beliefs, it is entirely possible that Nebuchadnezzar will be numbered among the saints.

In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar reaches a new spiritual perspicacity. Prior to his experience of insanity, his confessions were those of a pagan whose polytheism permitted the addition of new gods, as illustrated in Daniel 2:47 and 3:28-29. Now Nebuchadnezzar apparently worships the King of heaven only. For this reason, his autobiography is truly remarkable and reflects the fruitfulness of Daniel's influence upon him and probably of Daniel's daily prayers for him. Certainly God is no respecter of persons and can save the high and mighty in this world as well as the lowly.

210 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel*, p. 204.

211 For the relation of the Qumran document designated the "Prayer of Nabonidus," see later discussion on Daniel 4:28-33.

212 Cf. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Daniel*, p. 39; and J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, pp. 220-23; 247-49.

213 Charles, p. 37.

214 Ibid.

215 Montgomery, pp. 247-49.

216 Ibid., p. 222.

217 Cf. Leupold, pp. 170-71.

218 Ibid., p. 173.

219 E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, p. 99; Montgomery, pp. 225-26.

220 Leupold, p. 176; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel*, p. 48.

221 Driver, p. 48, citing his "Hebrew Authority," in *Authority and Archeology*, pp. 137-38.

222 Young, p. 99; cf. Driver, p. 48.

223 Leupold, p. 178.

224 Montgomery, pp. 229-30.

225 Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, p. 68.

226 Young, p. 101.

227 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 101-2; Leupold, p. 180; and Montgomery, pp. 228-30.

228 C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 150.

229 Montgomery, pp. 231-32.

230 Keil, pp. 148-51.

231 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

232 Young, p. 106.

233 Leupold, p. 190.

234 For further discussion of this, see Leupold, pp. 194-96.

235 Keil mentions the statements of Berosus in *Josephi Ant.* x. 11, 1, and *con. Ap.* i. 19, and of Abydenus in *Eusebii praepar. evang.* ix. 41, and *Chron.* i. p. 59; also the delineation of these buildings in *Duncker's Gesch. des Alterth.* i. p. 854 ff. (Keil, p. 159). See also the excellent description by Charles Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel*, pp. 66-67.

236 Montgomery, pp. 243-44.

237 Leupold, p. 201.

238 \*Keil notes that historical documents on this form of madness have been collected by Trusen in his *Sitten, Gebr. u. Krank. der alten Hebräer*, p. 205 f., 2d ed., and by Friedreich in *Zur Bibel*, i. p. 308 f. (Keil,

p. 160).

239 Keil, p. 159.

240 Young, p. 112.

241 Raymond Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament, pp. 1116-17.

242 Frank M. Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies, pp. 123-24; cf. Millar Burrows, More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls, p. 400, and David N. Freedman, "The Prayer of Nabonidus," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 145:31-32. For a conservative evaluation, see Raymond K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament, pp. 1117-21.

243 Montgomery, p. 245.

244 Young, p. 113.

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