

Daniel 4:1-18. *The King Dreams a Troubling Dream*. A declaration was sent through Babylon's empire—As you prosper greatly, let me tell you about the wonders and signs of "the Most High God" has done for me. The signs are not only mighty, but His kingdom is everlasting, His influence endures forever.

At home in my palace, contentedly prosperous, I had a dream which made me afraid. So I told all the wise men to come and interpret my troubling dream. As is often the case, they could not, so I looked to Daniel (aka Belteshazzar who is named after my god [Bel Marduk]).

I know the spirit of the holy gods is in you—no mystery is too difficult for you. Interpret my dream...

Before me stood an enormous tree,⁸ alone in the middle of the land; its top touched the sky and could be seen to the ends of the earth. Containing beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, beasts found shelter, birds lived in the branches—all creatures were fed. As I dreamt, an angel came from heaven calling loudly:

"Cut down the tree, trim its branches, strip the leaves, scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee and the birds fly away. But, let the stump and its roots, bound with iron &

DANIEL 4:1-18

[A Declaration:] King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! ²It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. ³How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. ⁶So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers [or *Chaldeans*] and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

⁹I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. ¹⁰These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree [i.e., Nebuchadnezzar, see verse 22] in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹²Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

¹³"In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, [or *watchman*] a holy one, coming down from heaven.

¹⁴He called in a loud voice:

"Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

"Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times [or years] pass by for him.

¹⁷"The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

¹⁸"This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

⁸In one of Nebuchadnezzar's building inscriptions, Babylon is compared to a spreading tree (see verse 4:22). The Chaldeans, while continuing the militaristic tradition of Assyria, created an astonishing renaissance of Sumero-Akkadian civilization. Led by Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), the Neo-Babylonian empire saw a building program of canals and monuments that was extremely ambitious. Classical authors rhapsodized about the capital city astride the Euphrates: for example, they said a four-horse chariot could turn atop the high, hundred-gated walls. Babylon also boasted one of the world's seven wonders, the famed Hanging Gardens, as well as a staged temple-tower 295 feet high and, according to Herodotus, several colossal gold statues weighing many tons. Discoveries of inscriptions in clay have shown that the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, absented himself at Tema in Arabia while his son, Belshazzar (*not* Daniel, Belteshazzar), acted as regent in the capital. [Corrected and adapted from Compton's NIV Advanced Commentary © 1996.]

bronze, remain. Let him be drenched with heaven's dew, and live with animals among the plants, so much so that he thinks like an animal for seven years.

This announcement shows all the living that the Most High is sovereign—over kingdoms, and gives His messengers to anyone He wishes.

This is my dream. Tell me Belteshazzar, what it means—none of the other knuckleheads can interpret it. You can, for you have the spirits of the gods in you.

Q To what extent is verses 2-3 Nebuchadnezzar's words versus Belteshazzar's (Daniel's)?

Note: the name used by Nebuchadnezzar regarding Belteshazzar's interpretation, verse 8.

Q Why was this dream frightening to Nebuchadnezzar without an interpretation?

Q To what extent was it a compliment to call Daniel (Belteshazzar) the "chief of the magicians?"

Q How do you suppose Daniel felt about being called officially Belteshazzar? What honorific do you find offensive? Supportive? And if the honorific is false, but positive?

Q To whom does Nebuchadnezzar give credit for Daniel's wisdom? So what?

Q How would you interpret the dream—without reading the verses following where Daniel does?

STOP!!!

ANSWER THE ABOVE QUESTION BEFORE PROCEEDING...

Daniel 4:19-22. *Daniel & a Troubling Dream: Good News?* Daniel freaked; he was terrified about telling the king the meaning of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar tried to reassure him—"Don't let the dream or its meaning alarm you."

Daniel responded—if only it were about your enemies. But, the tree you saw was growing large and strong. Beautiful leaves, abundant fruit, shelter for animals, food for all. You, O King, are that tree! You have become strong, and your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky. Your dominion reaches to the far corners of the earth. But...

Q Why was Daniel freaked?

Q To what extent was Daniel's interpretation correct? Politically? Metaphorically? Theologically?

DANIEL 4:19-22

Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you."

Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!"²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air—²² you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

Daniel 4:23-27. Daniel & a Troubling Dream: Now the Bad News? Daniel interprets:

O King, you indeed saw a messenger, holy and coming from heaven. The angel said to cut down the tree, but leave the stump, bound by bronze & iron, to remain for another day. Let the king be drenched with the dew of Heaven—let him live like a wild animal, until seven times [years] pass.

This is the interpretation; this is the Decree the Most High God has issued against my boss, the king. You'll be driven away from people, eating grass like a cow, and be drenched from above. Seven times [years?] will pass until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign, over kingdoms and gives them to whoever He wishes.

And the command to leave the stump in the ground? Your kingdom will eventually be restored—when you acknowledge Heaven⁹ rules. So? O King—accept my advice: renounce your sins by doing what is right; renounce your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be then that your prosperity will come back.

- Q What was God's purpose in providing Nebuchadnezzar this dream? Why would he provide the king "special" revelation about his destiny?
- Q To what extent is it a blessing or curse to eat grass like an animal and be driven away from people and lose the wealth of power and resources Nebuchadnezzar was facing?
- Q What was the political, theological, and pragmatic value of the stump being retained?
- Q Without reading ahead, do think Nebuchadnezzar will be pleased? How would he react? Is this a "works" approach to saving Nebuchadnezzar?

DANIEL 4:23-27

"You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

²⁴"This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:

²⁵You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes. ²⁶The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. ²⁷Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

**A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:
WHAT STUMP WAS LEFT IN YOUR LIFE
WHEN YOUR BRANCHES WERE TRIMMED,
AND YOUR FRUIT WAS DRIED UP?**

⁹"Heaven" was a Hebrew Scripture word for the Lord God Yahweh; see its manifestation in Matthew (e.g., 5:3 "theirs is the kingdom of heaven") and compare to Luke 6:20; i.e., "yours is the kingdom of God."

Daniel 4:28-37. Implications of Ignoring God's Messengers. Daniel was right—it happened. About a year later, the king was surveying the royal palace. Is this not a great residence I've built? By my mighty power and for my majesty's glory?

While his words were still on his lips, a voice from heaven spoke:

*This is what I decreed, King Nebuchadnezzar, your royal authority is been taken. You will be driven away from people and each grass like a cow. You'll live with wild animals for seven times [years?]
—until you acknowledge the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of people. He gives these kingdoms to whoever He wishes.*

Immediately it happened. Driven away from people, he was not only drenched by the dew of heaven until his hair grew like an eagle's feathers, he ate grass like a cow. His fingernails became like those of a bird's claw.

At the end, just as decreed, when I raised my eyes toward heaven, Nebuchadnezzar said, my sanity returned. I then praised the Most High, honoring and glorifying Him who lives forever. His power is eternal; His kingdom endures forever. Listen to my poetry:

All the earth's people are as nothing. He is sovereign—He does as He pleases, not only in heaven but on earth. No one can resist His power or even question Him, "What have You done?"

When my sanity was restored, so was my honor and splendor for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and the oligarchy sought me out; my throne was restored, and I became greater than ever.

So? I King Nebuchadnezzar praise and exalt and glorify the King of Heaven—everything He does is righteous, all His ways are just. And, for those who walk in pride? He is able to humble.

- Q Is this a Scriptural basis for using grass to evoke repentance?
Q Why did the Lord God make this dream come true for Nebuchadnezzar?
Q What attribute of the Lord God did Nebuchadnezzar based his theology? Problematic? If so, how?
Q Why are we not able to even ask "What have You done?" What happens when we do?
Q Why doesn't the Lord God always humble those who "walk in pride?" [See Proverbs 3:34; James 4:10 & 1 Peter 5:5-6.]

DANIEL 4:28-37

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by **my** mighty power and for the glory of **my** majesty?"

³¹The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, *This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.*³² *You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.*

³³Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

³⁶At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.