

## **Daniel Chapter 4**

The literary structure of Daniel 4 is fundamentally chiasmic, as follows:

- A. Prologue (vv. 1–3) v. 3: His kingdom and His rule.
- B. Dream and Inquiry (vv. 4–7)
  - 1. Setting (vv. 4–5)
  - 2. Decree of the King (v. 6)
  - 3. Decree unfulfilled (v. 7)
- C. Speech 1: the King to Daniel: dream recital (vv. 8–18)
  - 1. Spirit of Holy God is in you (v. 9a)
  - 2. Tell the interpretation (v. 9b)
  - 3. The dream (vv. 10–17)
    - a. The great tree
    - b. The tree cut down
    - c. The root preserved
    - d. The lesson learned
  - 2' Tell the interpretation (v. 18a)
  - 1' Spirit of Holy God is in you (v. 18b)
- D. Effect upon Daniel (v. 19a, b)**
- C' Speech 2: Daniel to the King: dream interpretation (vv. 19c–27)
  - 1. A dire prophecy (v. 19c)
  - 2. The dream (vv. 20–26)
    - a. The great tree: Nebuchadnezzar
    - b. The tree cut down: coming humiliation
    - c. The root preserved: the kingdom preserved
    - d. The lesson learned: it will be learned
  - 1' A good advice (v. 27)
- B' Dream Fulfillment (vv. 28–33)
  - 1. Setting (vv. 28–30)
  - 2. Decree of King of kings (vv. 31–32)
  - 3. Decree fulfilled (v. 33)
- A'. Epilogue (vv. 34–37) v. 34: His rule and His kingdom<sup>1</sup>

### ***Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream (4:1-18)***

Nebuchadnezzar's was "a reign of forty-three years"<sup>2</sup> (r. 605–562). "This **dream** of Nebuchadnezzar occurred thirty years after the dream in ch. 2."<sup>3</sup> The dream of chapter 2 was in 603 B.C.; thirty years later would be 573 B.C. or 11 years before his death. Nebuchadnezzar would have lived 4 years after he was restored to his throne if his dementia had lasted 7 years.

"This fourth and final incident from the life of Nebuchadnezzar belongs to the period when his great building projects had been completed (verse 30)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007), 237–238.

<sup>2</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 111.

<sup>3</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Da 4:5.

<sup>4</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 119.

**4:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king,**

“At this point, a summary of Nebuchadnezzar’s experience of God may be in order. From Daniel’s interpretation of the dream about the great image that portrayed the world empires, he learned that the God of the Hebrews was all powerful and all wise and could reveal mysteries no other god could make known. From the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he learned that Yahweh was Lord of nature and history and could by his miracle-working power override the will of the mightiest earthly potentates and deliver his servants from death. But it was not till his humiliation to the state of a beast of the field that Nebuchadnezzar really understood his weakness and folly before the almighty Lord of the Hebrews. At last he realized his utter dependence on Yahweh for his reason, his power, and his very life. He saw that he was but an instrument in the hands of the omnipotent God, the true Sovereign of the universe who ordered all history by his own decree. Thus the king of what was then the world’s greatest empire had to come to terms with the main teaching of the Book of Daniel—the absolute sovereignty of God and his faithfulness to his covenant people.”<sup>5</sup>

***To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:***

***Peace be multiplied to you.*** “This form of opening is common in Aramaic letters of the Persian period and is also found in Neo-Babylonian letters.”<sup>6</sup>

**4:2 *I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.***

“These verses are a royal proclamation by Nebuchadnezzar concerning the God of Israel in which the king celebrated what God had done for him and extolled His power and universal dominion.”<sup>7</sup>

**4:3 *How great are His signs,***

***And how mighty His wonders!***

***His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,***

***And His dominion is from generation to generation.***

Verses 2 & 3 sound much like the Psalms, and “The doxology (4:3) agrees almost word for word with Ps. 145:13.”<sup>8</sup> Rulers rarely wrote things like this themselves looking to their many scribes to provide suitable material for the moment. In this case, Daniel was probably the right scribe for this task, and the phraseology of the passage suggests as much.

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<sup>5</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 59.

<sup>6</sup> John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 538.

<sup>7</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Da 4:1–3.

<sup>8</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 97.

“Earthly might acknowledges the power of God; one who rules for a while as king acknowledges one whose kingship is unconstrained by time.”<sup>9</sup>

**4:4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation.**

Why couldn't they interpret the dream? The text says that “**they did not make known to me its interpretation**” 4:7, not that they *could not* make known the interpretation. They were certainly capable of making up stories as the need arose. Probably the answer lies in the story. They had some sense as to what it meant and were not about to tell Nebuchadnezzar that he was doomed! Kings have been known to cut off one's head for less. Let someone else do this dirty work.

They were most “reluctant to voice any interpretation adverse to the king, so they chose to remain silent.”<sup>10</sup>

**4:8 But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying:**

But why did Nebuchadnezzar wait till after he talked to all the other wise men in Babylon before he called for Daniel? Why do you wait until the fourth quarter to call in the first string? Nebuchadnezzar was as likely as the wise men of Babylon to understand that this was not a good sign, and from his prior experiences with Daniel (chapter 2), and his friends (chapter 3), he was not that anxious to hear from their God.

**4:9 “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.**

**4:10 These were the visions of my head while on my bed:**

**I was looking, and behold,  
A tree in the midst of the earth,  
And its height was great.**

“The concept of the Cosmic Tree at the center of the earth [4:10-11] that binds heaven and earth together is widespread.”<sup>11</sup> Because this was the case, Nebuchadnezzar is not really in the dark here.

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<sup>9</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 62.

<sup>11</sup> John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 539.

**4:11 The tree grew and became strong;  
Its height reached to the heavens,  
And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.**

**4:12 Its leaves were lovely,  
Its fruit abundant,  
And in it was food for all.  
The beasts of the field found shade under it,  
The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches,  
And all flesh was fed from it.**

**4:13 “I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. <sup>14</sup> He cried aloud and said thus:**

**watcher, a holy one or a holy watcher....** “The being here is identified as a “holy one” coming down from heaven, indicating this figure is an angel acting as a messenger of Yahweh.”<sup>12</sup>

“These terms utilize the arrangements of a human court to picture God’s management of the affairs of heaven and earth. An earthly king had watchmen, for instance, who were the eyes and ears whereby he controlled and provided for his realm.... The heavenly king governs his realm by similar means, members of the Council of Yahweh (1 Kgs 22:19–22; Job 1–2; Ps 89:6–8 [5–7]; Jer 23:18) who act as his eyes (2 Chr 16:9; Zech 4:10; cf. 1:9), keeping him informed on the affairs of his realm and seeing that his will is put into effect throughout it.”<sup>13</sup>

**‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,  
Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.  
Let the beasts get out from under it,  
And the birds from its branches.  
4:15 Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth,  
Bound with a band of iron and bronze,  
In the tender grass of the field.  
Let it be wet with the dew of heaven,  
And let him graze with the beasts  
On the grass of the earth.**

**Nevertheless leave the stump and roots....** “...a stump implies the hope of restoration....”<sup>14</sup>

**Bound with a band of iron and bronze....** “One possible explanation is that the reference is to a shackle put on an animal to restrain its movement....”<sup>15</sup> But more

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<sup>12</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Da 4:13.

<sup>13</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 88.

<sup>14</sup> John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 226.

<sup>15</sup> John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 227.

probably, it refers to the tree, “This likely indicates a band used to temporarily prevent the tree from growing.”<sup>16</sup>

**And let him graze with the beasts....** “At this point, it becomes obvious that the tree is a symbol of a person.”<sup>17</sup>

**4:16 Let his heart be changed from that of a man,  
Let him be given the heart of a beast,  
And let seven times pass over him.**

“...his heart will be changed away from that which is human. The meaning is that the crowning glory of the king, his reason, will be taken from him, and he will become like an irrational creature, a lower animal.”<sup>18</sup>

**seven times....** “The positive teaching of this verse is simply that for a definite period of time, the exact length of which is not stated, Nebuchadnezzar will be deprived of his reason.”<sup>19</sup>

**4:17 ‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers,  
And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,  
In order that the living may know  
That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,  
Gives it to whomever He will,  
And sets over it the lowest of men.’**

“Verse 17 adds that the reason for this sentence decreed by Heaven is that the full sovereignty of the “Most High” ... might be demonstrated before all the world, and that men might realize that human rulers exercise authority only by the permission of God, not because they are masters of their fate or captains of their soul.”<sup>20</sup>

The portrayal of man in his pride as a lofty tree is a familiar OT symbol:

*“For the day of the Lord of hosts  
Shall come upon everything proud and lofty,  
Upon everything lifted up—  
And it shall be brought low—  
Upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up,  
And upon all the oaks of Bashan;”* (Isaiah 2:12–13, NKJV)

**4:18 “This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to**

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<sup>16</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Da 4:15.

<sup>17</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Da 4:15.

<sup>18</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 104–105.

<sup>19</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 61.

**make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.”**

#### **Daniel Explains the Second Dream (4:19-27)**

**4:19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. So the king spoke, and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you.”**

“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.”<sup>21</sup>

**So the king spoke, and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you.”** “He courteously desires that, whatever the interpretation may be, Daniel should relate it. By his previous courage and steadfast adherence to principle, Daniel has won the confidence and respect of the king.”<sup>22</sup>

**Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!”**

This response would be proper court etiquette.

**4:20 “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which could be seen by all the earth, <sup>21</sup> whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home—  
4:22 it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.**

As suspected, “The tree symbolized the king himself, in the pride and extensiveness of his sovereignty.”<sup>23</sup>

**4:23 “And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him’; <sup>4:24</sup> this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: <sup>25</sup> They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.**

“In the end he will need to look to heaven as the real source of help, rather than pretending to be self-sufficient, to acknowledge that heaven rules, and as a king on

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<sup>21</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 106.

<sup>22</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 106.

<sup>23</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 107.

earth to worship the King of heaven who rules in heaven as on earth....”<sup>24</sup> **“...till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”**

**4:26 “And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules.**

“The fact that the stump was to be left shows that the king will not utterly be deprived of his kingdom, but that it would remain for him and again be his after the time when he has come to know that God and not himself is the real ruler.”<sup>25</sup> Till **“after you come to know that Heaven rules.”**

**4:27 Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”**

In the Roman Church, “This passage is commonly cited as an example of salvation by works. However, since Daniel knows nothing of NT salvation doctrine, his advice to Nebuchadnezzar should not be cited as support for this position. His point here is similar to Jonah’s in Jonah 3:4–9: The king has sinned and now faces God’s wrath; however, God may be gracious if the king repents and does what is right.”<sup>26</sup>

#### ***Nebuchadnezzar’s Humiliation (4:28-33)***

**4:28 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>29</sup> At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. <sup>30</sup> The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”**

After a year, Nebuchadnezzar may have forgotten the whole incident as the dream had not to come to pass. He does not appear to have taken the threat seriously, **“until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men, and He gives it to anyone He wants.”** (Daniel 4:25, NKJB). He is still just as arrogant as ever.

**4:31 While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! <sup>32</sup> And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”**

“The palace from which he surveyed Babylon was one of the citadels on the north side of the city. It had large courts, reception rooms, throne room, residences, and the famous hanging gardens, a vaulted, terraced structure with an elaborate water supply for its trees and plants, apparently built by Nebuchadnezzar for his Median queen.

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<sup>24</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 107.

<sup>26</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Da 4:27.

From the palace, he would see in the distance the city's 27km<sup>27</sup> outer double wall, which he had built. His palace stood just inside the double wall of the inner city, which was punctuated by eight gates and encircled an area 3km by 1 km, with the Euphrates running through it. The palace adjoined a processional avenue that Nebuchadnezzar had paved with limestone and decorated with lion figures, emblematic of Ishtar; this avenue entered the city through the Ishtar Gate, which he had decorated with dragons and bulls (emblems of Marduk and Bel). It continued south through the city to the most important sacred precincts, to whose beautifying and development Nebuchadnezzar had contributed, the ziggurat crowned by a temple of Marduk where the god's statue resided. In Marduk's temple there were also shrines to other gods, and in the city elsewhere temples of other Babylonian gods, restored or beautified by Nebuchadnezzar."<sup>28</sup>



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<sup>27</sup> 16.47 miles

<sup>28</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 89–90.









**4:33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.**

John Walton notes that “A fragmentary cuneiform text seems to refer to some mental disorder afflicting Nebuchadnezzar and perhaps his neglecting and leaving Babylon, maybe putting his son Amel-Marduk in charge for a while, and then of his repentance for neglect of the worship of the gods.”<sup>29</sup> This would have been the pagan spin that the court would have put on this event.

“The disease which came upon the king is known technically as Lycanthropy, in which the sufferer imagines himself to be changed into an animal and, to a certain extent, acts like that animal.”<sup>30</sup>

### ***Nebuchadnezzar Praises God (4:34-37)***

**4:34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 is from generation to generation.***

**4:35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;  
He does according to His will in the army of heaven  
And among the inhabitants of the earth.  
No one can restrain His hand  
Or say to Him, “What have You done?”**

**4:36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me.**

**4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.**

Much of this is generic and makes no specific mention of Yahweh, the God of Judah.

At its conclusion, we ask ourselves why is this story shared with Daniel's readers? Because it is “a reassurance to Jews that their gentile masters do not have absolute power.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 540–541.

<sup>30</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 112.

<sup>31</sup> John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 233.

“The captive Jews needed to know that even the apparently limitless power of Nebuchadnezzar was under the control of the Lord God Almighty, who still cared for them and had a great future for them in their land.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 68.

