



SUMMARY- DANIEL 4:1-37

King Nebuchadnezzar opens by publicly honoring God, but he grows proud in his prosperity. God gives him a dream warning of judgment. Daniel interprets it, exhorting the king to repent. He won't. God hands him over to insanity for a season until he learns that the Most High rules over the kingdom of man. In the end, Nebuchadnezzar is restored and blesses God.

STRUCTURE

- I. The Most High God is praised by a still-proud king for His wonders (1-3)
- II. The Most High God troubles the proud king with a dream (4-18)
- III. The prophet of the Most High interprets the dream and urges repentance (19-27)
- IV. The Most High God humbles the proud king by fulfilling the dream (28-33)
- V. The Most High God receives true praise from the humbled king (34-37)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

If Daniel 2 displays God's *revelatory* power, and Daniel 3 shows His *saving* power, Daniel 4 reveals His *sovereign* power. One lesson at a time, God instructs the Babylonians. But learning does not come easily. Each story contains a contest, and Babylon keeps losing. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar loses everything.

He begins well—or so it appears. The chapter opens with Nebuchadnezzar blessing the Most High God, but then he slips back into familiar patterns. No sooner does he praise God than he praises himself. One wonders how deeply God's truth has penetrated. By the end, we know. Chapter 4 concludes as it began: with another doxology. It mirrors the introduction while also contrasting it. He doesn't just marvel, he bows. He moves from testifying about God's power to knowing Him by experience: "those who walk in pride he is able to humble." At last, the king has learned who truly rules the kingdoms of man.

Immediately after his superficial praise, the humbling begins. The king is "at ease" in his house, "prospering" in his palace. God disturbs his throne with a holy nightmare. None of Babylon's wise men can interpret the warning, so a Jewish exile named Daniel answers. Babylon loses again.

The dream foretells a season when proud Nebuchadnezzar will descend into madness. Like most dreams, it includes symbolic imagery: a tree for the king and his empire, birds and beasts for people under his rule, fruit and shade for the benefit of his monarchy. The dream turns literal when a heavenly being descends—a subtle critique of the king's "lofty" position—and pronounces judgment.

The chapter is organized around a series of divine reversals: ease becomes terror, a tree is chopped down, boastful words are silenced, and majesty turns to madness. The one who ruled "beasts" now lives as one; the one who provided for "birds" now looks like one. For seven years—the number of divine completion—Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and his kingdom.

Each reversal shows how God raises up kings and removes them. And He acts on His own timetable, which is a major theme. Throughout the book of Daniel, kings try to control time. They accuse people of buying time (2:8-9), insist on their own schedule (6:7-12), and "think to change the times and the law" (7:25). But we have already learned that the Most High God "changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings" (2:21). Kings live by God's clock—not the other way around.

The story of Daniel 4 is not just about pride and humility. It is about a God who controls history. This puts Him at odds with proud kings who seek to make history at the expense of their citizens. God humbles them, but not just to show who's in charge. We see in this story the missionary heart of God. The Most High wants lesser kings to know Him, to rule like Him, and for the citizens of earth to become citizens of His Kingdom.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! 2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

—In its original form, the Bible did not come with chapter divisions or verse numbers. Those were added much later, and the Hebrew-Aramaic tradition and many English translations divide these verses differently. The former treats them as the conclusion to chapter 3, while the latter places them at the beginning of chapter 4. In reality, the passage functions as a perfect bridge between the chapters—both concluding the miraculous deliverance of chapter 3 and introducing the testimony of chapter 4.

—“for me” communicates that these “signs and wonders” are not only cosmic in their significance but personal to the king.

—In chapter 4, the king’s praise forms an inclusio. The section begins and ends with praise for the Most High God. This structure reinforces the theme of the chapter: The Most High God rules the kingdoms of man, and He gives authority to whomever He pleases.

—The middle section reveals that the praise of 4:1–3 is still incomplete. Nebuchadnezzar openly acknowledges the greatness of the Most High, yet his heart remains proud and resistant. He still acts like a pagan king: he summons his Babylonian wise men, refers to Daniel by the name of his god, and boasts in Babylon as though his kingdom were secured by his own glory (Dan. 4:6–9, 18, 27, 30). Only after his humiliation does his praise become the confession of a man who has been humbled (4:34–37).

—This opening takes the form of a public communication. In the prior section, Nebuchadnezzar demanded *public* veneration of an idol; then God *publicly* vindicated His servants and glorified Himself; now Nebuchadnezzar *publicly* acknowledges Israel’s God.

—This matters because it shows how God is not intimidated by public power. He turns it into a stage for His own “signs and wonders” (4:2–3). The point is not that Nebuchadnezzar says nice things about God; it’s that the whole public order is reversed. The king who demanded public acknowledgement now publicly acknowledges the Most High God.

—The “signs and wonders” include Daniel revealing a dream and its interpretation (Dan. 2) and rescuing his servants from the fire (Dan. 3). So far, God has shown that He alone is the revealer of mysteries and He alone can deliver from death. His mission is not complete, however, until He shows Nebuchadnezzar that He alone—not the king, not Babylon’s gods—rules over the kingdoms of man and gives them to whomever He pleases.

—“His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom... dominion endures... generation to generation”:

- Daniel 2 revealed that Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would not endure. It would be supplanted by a series of lesser kingdoms, culminating in God’s greater kingdom.
- This verse echoes Daniel 2:44: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”
- It will repeat again in 7:14 about Jesus, the Son of Man: “And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”
- And again in 7:27 about those who serve God: “And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

—In the structure of the Book of Daniel, this represents a progression: God alone rules forever (ch. 2)→Babylon is forced to confess God’s supreme rulership (ch. 4)→God’s supreme rulership is vested in the Son of Man (7:14)→God’s kingdom is shared with the saints (7:27). To quote Luke 12:32, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

—To put all this differently: What is stated in chapter 2 as prophecy is echoed in chapter 4 as confession, then unveiled in chapter 7 as apocalypse (unveiling of the last days).

—This passage clarifies the nature of God’s kingdom. It is not just a castle in the sky that houses departed saints. It is terrestrial. Like Babylon and its successors, God rules lesser kings, peoples, and lands. When we pray, “May your kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are asking God to make His reign visible. When Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, He did just that (Matt. 12:28). God’s kingdom advances until Christ returns and “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ” (Rev. 11:15). Then Jesus will rule over the earth, on the earth, and without rival.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. 5 I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. 6 So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation.

—The first three verses begin as a letter to Nebuchadnezzar's subjects, but they could feasibly just be read as a quote. Here the king clearly speaks in the first person.

—This is significant because it shifts from public proclamation to personal confession. God exhibits His rule not just in the public discourse but on the battlefield of human hearts. Not even the highest king is beyond the reach of this spiritual war.

—“ease in my house and prospering in my palace”: Comfort and prosperity feed the king's pride. God lovingly awakens him—ironically, in his sleep.

—“As I lay in bed the fancies and visions of my head alarmed me”:

- The dream confronts Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance. See Job 33:11-14 (NASB): *14 "Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, [yet] no one notices it. 15 In a **dream, a vision of the night**, When deep sleep falls on people, While they slumber in their beds, 16 Then He opens the ears of people, And **horrifies them with warnings**, 17 So that He may turn a person away [from bad] conduct, And keep a man from **pride**; 18 He keeps his soul back from the pit, And his life from perishing by the spear."*
- God sometimes shakes proud men through dreams. The terror is itself a mercy, given to stop Nebuchadnezzar from racing off the cliff-edge of his own ego.

—“wise men of Babylon”: Mirroring chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar calls on his “wise” counselors. This time, he doesn't demand they tell him the dream, only its interpretation. Again, they fail to do even that. God's wisdom triumphs over man's.

8 At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, 9 "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.

—“At last Daniel came in before me”: The opening preposition foreshadows the outcome. Daniel, not the astrologers of Babylon, can interpret the dream.

—“he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god”: The king refers to Daniel by his Hebrew name at first, but acknowledges his idolatrous Babylonian identity. The contrast is telling. Even while praising the Most High, the king still reveals the remnants of his old pagan worldview. Yet he speaks of that idol-bound perspective in the past tense, suggesting that by the end of the chapter he has come to see it for what it was.

—“in whom is the spirit of the holy gods”:

- The Aramaic can be translated either “the spirit of the holy gods” or “the Spirit of the holy God.” The wording itself allows some ambiguity.
- At the time Nebuchadnezzar first summoned Daniel, he likely understood this in pagan terms—“gods.” But by the end of the chapter, after his humbling, he would be much closer to saying “God.”
- Since Nebuchadnezzar is narrating these events after the fact, the phrase may intentionally preserve that tension. It reflects both the king's earlier pagan framework and his later, deeper recognition of the Most High.
- The ambiguity captures a king in transition—still speaking with the vocabulary of Babylon, yet moving toward the truth about the Most High.
- Pharaoh speaks similarly about Joseph: “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” (Gen. 41:38). Daniel and Joseph both rise to prominence from exile thanks to the God-given ability to interpret dreams of great consequence.
- Daniel is thus presented as a new Joseph figure. The parallel shows: (1) God's sovereignty follows His people into exile; (2) Wisdom belongs to God, not empire; (3) The God who ruled in Genesis still rules in Daniel.
- The Joseph-Daniel parallel also shows that exile does not cancel covenant. The God who called Abraham and formed Israel under Moses is still at work under pagan rule. Ruthless empires cannot overturn His promises, halt the advance of His kingdom, or prevent the preservation and vindication of His kingdom citizens.

[Verses 10-18: Nebuchadnezzar recounts the dream. Since Daniel interprets the details in vv. 20-26, I will save comments for that section.]

19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"

—"Daniel... dismayed for a while... his thoughts alarmed him":

- The king is alarmed because judgment threatens him. The prophet is alarmed because judgment grieves him. This is striking, considering Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are responsible for Daniel's exile and the suffering of his people.
- Daniel is a model for how we speak truth to power. On one hand, we must not back down. On the other hand, we must not announce judgment with giddy joy.
- I'm reminded of Revelation 11, where two prophets speak truth to power wearing sackcloth—the garment of mourning. Prophetic boldness must be joined to prophetic grief. Our words must be fire; our eyes must be water.

—"let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you":

- The king discerns Daniel's alarm and fears the inevitable: an ominous oracle.
- Secondly, Nebuchadnezzar seems to show compassion for Daniel. He has grown to respect the prophet whose life he once threatened.

—"may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies":

- Despite suffering greatly at the king's hands, Daniel wishes blessing upon the pagan emperor. This is shocking. He has truly made peace with God's decreed exile. His example instructs believers in navigating godless power structures. It's not enough to avoid even the appearance of political revolution. We must also honor evil kings. As we read in the New Testament, "Honor the emperor"—Peter says this of one who will soon crucify him upside-down (according to church tradition).
- But doesn't Daniel take this to an extreme? Nebuchadnezzar was brutal, yet Daniel wishes blessing upon him! Must we wish blessing upon tyrants? If I lived under Hitler's Third Reich, I can only imagine that I would pray for his downfall and celebrate it when it came.
- We must interpret Daniel's response in light of the fuller context. In verse 27, Daniel exhorts the king to repent, turn to Yahweh, and rule justly. His desire for Nebuchadnezzar's blessing is not unconditional. He is not accommodating tyranny. He is rooting for the best outcome: a humbled, repentant, and reformed king. A king who seeks the good of his people in submission to Yahweh. A king who rules justly.
- The application, then, is not that we bless injustice. Rather, we seek mercy from the God of heaven for kings who rule unjustly. This is the best possible outcome, much like the exhortation of Psalm 2: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way... Blessed are all who take refuge in him."
- Daniel's example models a heart posture above all. We must avoid stewing on hatred and nurturing vengeance. Instead, we wish—and even pray—the best for godless kings. The "best" is not downfall, but humility and repentance. That said, if God brings down unrepentant tyrants, we can celebrate it as a second-best outcome. Pr. 11:10: "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and **when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.**"
- Beyond the realm of unrepentant tyrants, a similar principle applies in personal relationships. Jesus commands us to pray for our enemies, and Paul says to bless them. This does not mean we ask God to prosper their wickedness. Our primary prayer of blessing is that God would lead them to repentance. And if they suffer the consequences of their actions, our response should not be gloating, but sober recognition that God's justice may yet become the means of their salvation.

20 The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, 21 whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— 22 it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. 23 And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of

iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,' 24 this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, 25 that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. 26 And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.

—Symbols:

- Daniel explicitly interprets these:
 - Tree = king Nebuchadnezzar; by extension, his kingdom (restoration of the kingdom is tied to the stump)
 - Strength and size of the tree = his greatness and dominion
 - Watcher = heavenly being sent “from heaven” to announce a decree
 - Chop down the tree = coming judgment on Nebuchadnezzar
 - Leave the stump = the judgment is severe but not final. Restoration possible.
- Other apparent meanings:
 - Beautiful leaves = glorious empire
 - Food and shade = provision and shelter for the nations
 - Branches = sprawling empire
 - Birds and beasts = rulers and people dependent upon Babylon
 - Grass = contrast with tree-top, Nebuchadnezzar brought to the lowest place. He will, in fact, literally eat grass.
 - Bound with a band of iron and bronze = Nebuchadnezzar suffering divine restraint during the period of judgment. Possibly also, the stump being protected until the judgment is complete.
 - Seven periods = seven years (most interpreters agree)

—“its top reached to heaven”:

- This reflects not only the height of his empire but also his pride. This becomes clear when God humbles him down to earth to eat grass.
- The tree reaches “to heaven”; the heavenly being is sent “from heaven”. The contrast is deliberate. Man builds his kingdom up to heaven, but no matter the heights we attain, heaven always comes down. It is always higher. Empires rise; heaven rules.

—Empires are not entirely bad. Even evil empires supply levels of provision, protection, and stability for their people. The Apostle Paul will later say that kings bear the sword of justice—even though Rome’s sword would one day remove his head.

—Daniel 4 presents a balanced political theology. Babylon is not the kingdom of God, and the Most High will judge its evils. But if we lack Daniel’s balance, we will drift into one of two errors: becoming either hypercritical or naïve. Daniel charts a better path between these extremes. God calls His people to speak prophetically against the evils of empire, while also recognizing the real blessings of government.

—The imagery of a tree ruling over beasts and birds recalls Genesis 1. God created man to rule over the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens—to subdue the earth as His representative. In that sense, the kingdom of man performs a creational task. It exercises dominion. But instead of representing God, it seeks to replace Him. That is why its rule turns cruel. And that is why God judges it.

—“watcher”:

- The rest of Scripture does not use this language. It only appears in 4:13, 17, and 23.
- This is a heavenly being. It is called “a holy one” (4:13, 17, 23), and it comes down from heaven (4:13, 23). The “decree of the watchers” (4:17) is parallel to “the decree of the Most High” (4:24).
- The term suggests an alert, watchful, observant heavenly being—something like the “eyes and ears” of the Most High. This does not imply that God Himself does not see or hear. He does. But He often governs through appointed emissaries. We see a similar pattern in Genesis 18, where the Lord appears with two heavenly beings and speaks of going down to see whether the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is as great as the outcry against them.
- In intertestamental literature, the idea of “watchers” becomes much more developed. In 1 Enoch, the Watchers are a class of heavenly beings, especially remembered as the angels who sinned by leaving their proper place, corrupting the earth, and taking wives from among human women (see Gen. 6). In

Jubilees, however, the faithful watchers are portrayed more positively as heavenly beings sent to instruct humanity in righteousness. So Daniel uses the term in a simple and restrained way—a watchful heavenly emissary of God—whereas later Jewish literature expands it into a broader and more elaborate angelology.

—The “decree of the watchers” (4:17) and the “decree of the Most High” (4:24) contrast with Nebuchadnezzar’s own decree (4:6). Throughout Daniel, the king keeps issuing decrees, as though his word were sovereign (2:12–15; 3:10–11, 29; 4:6). But Daniel shows the difference between earthly and heavenly rule. Nebuchadnezzar’s decrees are loud, angry, and fleeting. God’s decree is final and effective. His Word commands history.

—“seven periods”:

- Daniel 4 does not merely say Nebuchadnezzar will be humbled “for a while.” It says he will be humbled for a measured sevenfold period. That matters because, later in the book, Daniel repeatedly thinks in terms of God-appointed symbolic periods: “a time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 7, then the much larger “seventy sevens” in Daniel 9. Daniel 4 is earlier, smaller, and narrative rather than visionary, but it already trains the reader to see history as governed by heaven’s timetable.
- Throughout Daniel, tyrants grasp for control over times and seasons, but that authority belongs to God alone. Daniel 2 makes this explicit: “He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan. 2:21). Later, the arrogant little horn embodies the same rebellion, seeking to usurp what belongs to God: “he shall think to change the times and the law” (Dan. 7:25). Against that backdrop, Nebuchadnezzar’s “seven periods” in Daniel 4 are fitting. Seven likely carries its usual biblical sense of fullness or completion: the king will be humbled for the full measure God appoints—no more, no less. Nebuchadnezzar may rule a vast empire, but he cannot rule the calendar of his own humiliation. Heaven keeps the clock.

—“you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven”:

- Nebuchadnezzar exalts himself toward the status of a god; the true God casts him down beneath the dignity of man.
- The king who would rise above his place is reduced below it.
- Ironically, the tree once sheltered the beasts, but now even the king loses that shelter. The one who towered over others is left exposed to the elements, stripped of both glory and cover.

—“till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”:

- This is the theme of the chapter. Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation is not just an act of judgment; it is pedagogical. God is teaching him who reigns above all.
- God has not yet removed the kingdom of men, but He remains sovereign over it. Human kings truly rule—but only derivatively. Their authority is delegated, not ultimate. God appoints kings, sustains kings, and removes kings as He pleases.
- The point, then, is not merely that Nebuchadnezzar must become less proud. It is that he must learn the source and limit of his power.

27 Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

—Just as with Scripture, so also with prophecy—there are three aspects: revelation, interpretation, and application. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was the revelation. Daniel gave the interpretation in 4:19–26. Here in v. 27, he applies it.

—“break off your sins... and your iniquities”: Daniel calls the king to STOP sinning.

—“practicing righteousness... showing mercy to the oppressed”:

- Daniel calls the king to START living obediently to God.
- “righteousness” orients his actions toward Yahweh, while “showing mercy” directs His love toward people. One of the king’s primary faults is his brutality. Kings must use power not to flex but to care for the weak. Not to brutalize, but to bless.
- Nothing in the dream indicates that Nebuchadnezzar was being punished for oppressing people. The tree even shows him providing for his citizens. So how does Daniel discern this application? First, there is a subtle indication of pride in v. 11, where the tree reached “to the top of heaven”. Second, the

judgment builds on this theme as a heavenly being comes “down from heaven”. Despite the king’s supposed ascent, heaven still comes down. Implicitly, Nebuchadnezzar’s “height” relates not only to his actual authority but his perceived importance. Third, the nature of the judgment—being chopped down and made into a lowly beast—implicates pride as the cause. Fourth, the heavenly being explains that the length of his humiliation persists until the Most High God is acknowledged as ultimately in charge. All these indicators provide Daniel with enough to conclude that God is condemning Nebuchadnezzar’s ego. The scene of 4:28-31 confirms this.

—“that there may be perhaps a lengthening of your prosperity”:

- Daniel knows his God. When kings repent, God relents. Examples:
 - **Rehoboam**: Humbled himself with the princes of Judah when warned by the prophet; God did not destroy them completely, but granted some deliverance (2 Chron. 12:5–7).
 - **Ahab**: Tore his clothes, fasted, wore sackcloth, and humbled himself; God delayed the announced disaster until his son’s days (1 Kgs. 21:27–29).
 - **Manasseh**: Humbled himself greatly in affliction and prayed to God; God heard him, restored him to his kingdom in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 33:12–13).
 - **Hezekiah**: Humbled himself after his heart grew proud; God’s wrath did not come in his days (2 Chron. 32:25–26).
 - **The king of Nineveh** — Rose from his throne, covered himself with sackcloth, and called for citywide repentance; God relented from the announced disaster (Jonah 3:6–10).
- There is no guarantee when we repent that physical consequences can be avoided. But there is a chance. I’m reminded of Joel 2:13-14: “Return to the Lord your God... Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him...”

28 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" 31 While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, 32 and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." 33 Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

—“At the end of twelve months”:

- God gave him time to repent. If wickedness prospers for a season, this is often the reason. Jesus has delayed His return so the world can repent (2 Pet. 3:9).
- “twelve months” reinforces the theme of time. A list of “time” themes in Daniel:
 - Dan. 1: Ten days of testing, three years of training, “at the end of that time” (1:18).
 - Dan. 2: King demands immediate answers, Daniel asks for time. 2:21: God “changes times and seasons.” Empires fall, the Kingdom endures. Vision is for “the latter days” (2:28).
 - Dan. 3: “when you hear” the music, immediate compliance is demanded.
 - Dan. 4: Twelve months given to repent, “seven periods of time” pass.
 - Dan. 5: Babylon’s time is up. God numbers the days of each kingdom.
 - Dan. 6: A thirty-day testing period, Daniel’s 3x/day prayer.
 - Dan. 7: Beasts rule for a season. A tyrant (“little horn”) tries to change times and divine decrees. Saints handed over for “a time, times, and a half time.”
 - Dan. 8: Vision focuses on “the time of the end” (8:17, 19).
 - Dan. 9: Seventy weeks, repeated sevens. Jeremiah’s seventy years.
 - Dan. 10: Daniels fasts for 21 days. Revelation comes at the end.
 - Dan. 11: “appointed time” (11:27, 29, 35), “time of the end” (11:35, 40).
 - Dan. 12: “time of trouble” (12:1); “time of the end” (12:3, 9); “time, times, and half a time” (12:7); 1290 days (12:11); 1335 days (12:12).
- In the narrative portions of Daniel, God’s people suffer a “time” of testing, while Babylon seeks to enforce its own schedule. Repeatedly we learn that God sets the schedule, and kings fail to resist it.

They can only cooperate. The apocalyptic visions of the last half of Daniel reveal the same reality, but they focus on future times.

—“he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon”: While this practice was common in the Ancient Near East, where homes provided space to walk on the roof, this is more than a random detail. The king’s elevated position symbolizes his pride. We are reminded of David eyeing Bathsheba from his rooftop. Pride comes before the fall.

—“Is not this great Babylon... I have built by my mighty power... for the glory of my majesty?”

- The pronouns are telling: “I... my... my”. The self-exalting king boasts in the greatness of his empire, the power of his might, and the glory of his majesty.
- Tyrants throughout the Book of Daniel often boast. This is one way to spot a tyrant: what comes out of his mouth?
 - The tyrant of Daniel 7 had “a mouth **speaking great things**” (7:8). Daniel noted “the **sound of the great words that the horn was speaking**” (7:11). Also, “He shall **speak words against the Most High**” (7:25).
 - 8:25: “By his **cunning** he shall make **deceit** prosper under his hand, and **in his own mind he shall become great.**”
 - 11:36: “He shall **exalt himself and magnify himself** above every god, and shall **speak astonishing things against the God of gods.**”

—“While the words were still in the king’s mouth”:

- Even though judgment has been delayed for twelve months, it strikes in God’s perfect timing—at the precise moment of Nebuchadnezzar’s boast.
- The king’s words fall flat; God’s words stand (“there fell a voice from heaven”).
- I’m reminded of Acts 12:21-24: “*On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, “**The voice of a god, and not of a man!**” Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But **the word of God increased and multiplied.**”*
- In Acts 12, as in Daniel 4, a king seizes glory only to lose it. Both kings are brought low—Nebuchadnezzar, to the level of beasts; Herod, to the level of worms. And in both cases, God’s Word prevails against the boastful words of man.

—“driven from among men... dwelling shall be with beasts... eat grass”:

- The king exalts himself above man as a god; God casts him below man as a beast.
- “beast” reminds us of prior parts of the vision, where the “tree”—Nebuchadnezzar—provides fruit and shade for the beasts, who represent citizens. The language completes a reversal: The king who ruled beasts now lives as one.
- “beast” also reminds us of later visions, where devouring beasts represent brutal empires. Kings who pretend they are gods instead become beastly.
- “eat grass”: The king who dehumanized citizens finds himself dehumanized.
- Medical practitioners have documented cases of “lycanthropy” where humans believe themselves to be animals and act like them. Could this be an ancient example of God judging a king by turning him over to mental illness?

—“seven periods of time shall pass over you”:

- Most interpreters agree this means seven years.
- “seven” is, of course, the biblical number of fulfillment/perfection/completion. God’s timetable cannot be shortened.
- Given the parallels between the first and second half of Daniel, we can’t help but notice similar periods of “sevens” in Daniel 9. There, God decrees “seventy sevens” for the completion of Israel’s spiritual exile—fulfilled in Christ’s first coming.
- Hamilton: “When we recognize that we are dealing with the end of a ‘sevenfold’ period of time in Daniel 4, we begin to wonder whether the historical story of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity and restoration might point to something beyond itself—something like the restoration of Israel after its own sevenfold period of wandering insanity” (cf. Dan. 9:1-2, 24-27).

- “until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”:
- Nebuchadnezzar’s “exile”—like Israel’s—is not sheer punishment. It is pedagogical. God teaches pagan kings, just as He teaches His own kingdom citizens.
 - What does He teach them? Yahweh rules. And He exercises dominion by raising up and bringing down kings whenever He pleases.
 - It’s hard to fathom how God would raise up such tyrants, but He does this very thing throughout Daniel. Therefore, we must keep in mind these biblical truths:
 - God limits the tyrants. He defines the scope of their power and the duration of their reign.
 - God judges the tyrants. They answer to Him.
 - God designed the world to be tyrant-free. As mentioned earlier, the vision of the tree recalls Genesis 1, where man images God by ruling the earth justly. Tyrants reign because sin does. This is our fault, not God’s.
 - God’s patience with tyranny owes to His mercy, not His indifference. Just as He gave Nebuchadnezzar time to repent, He delays judgment to give the world time to repent before the Son of Man returns on the clouds of heaven.
 - In God’s appointed time, tyrants will be replaced by the perfect reign of the Son of Man. He fulfills the Genesis 1 mandate.
- “hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws”:
- We have already commented on Nebuchadnezzar’s humbling to the level of “beast”. Here, he resembles a bird. This is significant because of his dream, where the tree provided for both the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens. Again, the king who ruled beasts and birds now lives like a beast and a bird.
 - This part of the vision links with the beast of Dan. 7:4, which represents Babylon: “The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.” Nebuchadnezzar was like a ferocious lion, but God humbled him to live like a winged creature. Ultimately, however, God gives him “the mind of a man”. This happens in 4:34: “my reason returned to me.”

34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; 35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" 36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

—“At the end of the days”: Again, the theme of divinely ordered time is prominent. Only the Most High controls the clock. Those who govern the earth do not govern time.

—“my reason returned to me”: Not only did he regain the mind of a man; he found true wisdom. The last words on his lips praised his own glory; the first words now praise God.

—In Daniel 2 and 3, Nebuchadnezzar praises God, but subsequent stories clarify that he had not yet submitted to Yahweh. This time seems different. We can’t be dogmatic about this, but I believe we will see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven.

—“all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing”: This does not mean God doesn’t care for us. It actually magnifies His care for us. As the Psalmist exclaims, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, yet crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:4-5). The wonder of the universe is that despite its great vastness, God sets His eye on the man of dust.

—“does according to his will... none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”

- Tyrants imagine they can do as they will:
 - 8:4: “He did as he pleased and became great.”
 - 11:3: “Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills.”

- 11:16: "He who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him."
 - 11:36: "And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god..."
 - Each of these verses must be read in the context of 4:35. Tyrants do as they will, but only on the surface. He deposes them when He pleases.
 - When you hear political leaders promising to lower taxes, win wars, stop wars, expand trade deals, and increase GDP, remember: they cannot truly do as they will. Times and seasons belong to the Most High God. Success belongs to Him. And if He decrees failure, none can resist His will.
- "reason returned... glory/majesty/splendor returned... and still more greatness was added to me": The restoration of his fortune is presented as a blessing of repentance. One thinks of Job repenting in dust and ashes, then receiving a two-fold blessing.
- "all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble": Nebuchadnezzar does not begrudge God's discipline. He cherishes it. So must we. God uses pain to fashion our hearts into His image so we can rule the earth like Him.



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