

Daniel

Chapter 4

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! ² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. ³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. ⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I 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. ⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, 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.) ⁹ I 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. ¹⁰ These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its 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, a holy one, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He 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. ¹⁵ But 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. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times 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."

Ch 4 Luth: "A pointed example is directed against the bloodthirsty and the tyrants. For the great and mighty king [Nebuchadnezzar] is here robbed of his reason. He becomes so raving mad that he has to be treated like a mad dog, chained and put out in the field because people cannot stand his presence. Today, because we simply read this in a book, it may appear as a minor matter. If

we had been present, however, and seen something like this, we would have been witnessing a terrifying and horrible judgment of God. Everyone would have been moved with compassion for all the overlords and evil tyrants, that they have to expect such gruesome judgment when they abuse their position as rulers. This too, however, happened for purposes of consolation—at that time the consolation of the wretched captive Jews [Judeans], today and evermore the consolation of those who are plagued by tyrants or who suffer injustice—that men may see how God intends and is able to avenge us against our enemies even more fully than we dare to dream. As Psalm 58[:10] declares” (AE 35:297). (TLSB)

4:1 Salutation of Nebuchadnezzar’s open letter relating what had happened to him. (TLSB)

4:2 *signs and wonders*. What Nebuchadnezzar experienced was a miracle. (TLSB)

Most High. Occurs again in vv 17, 24, 25, 32, 34. (TLSB)

4:3 Nebuchadnezzar began and ended with praise (vv 34–35). (TLSB)

kingdom. Lit, “rule of a king.” (TLSB)

dominion. Lit, “rule of a lord” (Lat *dominus*). (TLSB)

4:1–3 Nebuchadnezzar reached this conclusion after the experiences of vv. 4–37. The language of his confession may reflect Daniel’s influence. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar wants others to know how the eternal King has changed his life. God likewise works in our lives to convict us of sin and assure us of His grace and forgiveness. • Holy Spirit, may I ever acknowledge Your work in me through Word and Sacrament. Amen. (TLSB)

4:4 CONTENTED AND PROSPEROUS – Things were going well for Nebuchadnezzar (cf v. 27). Babylon was near the height of its power. (TLSB)

4:5 DREAM...TERRIFIED ME – The notice of Nebuchadnezzar’s ease and prosperity is set in contrast to his reaction to the dream: it upset his ease by causing him fear and dread. Note the contrast to his reaction to the dream in Daniel 2. Here the verbs signal fear, whereas in 2:1, 3, the verb **ܕܘܥܩ** indicates consternation, but not fear. This may be the reason why in this case the king does not demand that his wise men first tell him the dream and then its interpretation (as he had demanded in Daniel 2). He is so frightened that he wants to know the meaning immediately, and so he does not challenge his diviners with the task of telling him the contents of the dream first. (CC)

4:6 WISE MEN OF BABYLON – “The wise men” in 4:6) are further defined as “the magicians, the soothsayers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners” in 4:7). This list of occult practitioners is similar to the list in 2:2, except that “the sorcerers” (**ܕܝܦܫܫܝܢ**) there are replaced by “the diviners” (**ܕܝܪܝܢܝܢ**) here. The change may simply be due to the difference between Hebrew (2:2) and Aramaic. In any case, just as in Daniel 2, the “wise men” of Babylon are unable to interpret the dream (cf. 1 Cor 1:19). They may indeed have been able to contact the powers of darkness and attempt to utilize them for their purposes, as the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt did initially (cf. Ex 7:11–12, 22;

8:3, 14–15). However, as in Daniel 2, this dream is a revelation from a far higher power: the one true and triune God (“the Most High,”). His thoughts and plans are inaccessible to the demonic powers, who nevertheless often hold sway over fallen sinners on earth. But God grants his people surpassing wisdom, deliverance from bondage to those powers, and victory over the devil. (CC)

4:8 Nebuchadnezzar recognized that Daniel was specially blessed by God (1:17), though his own knowledge of the true God remained quite limited. (TLSB)

FINALLY DANIEL CAME – Here Daniel does not come before the king together with the pagan diviners who comprise the “wise men” of Babylon. Instead, just as in chapter 2, he comes before Nebuchadnezzar only after the wise men fail to interpret the dream. While he is later described as the leader of the wise men (5:11), he is never presented before royalty as merely part of their group. (CC)

Nebuchadnezzar gives two pieces of information about Daniel when introducing him to the readers of this letter. First, he tells his readers that Daniel is called “Belteshazzar,” after the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god, who was Bel (also called Marduk). Daniel is only called by his Hebrew name twice in this chapter, and each time his Babylonian name immediately follows. Elsewhere in the chapter, Daniel is only called by his Babylonian name. In the quotations of Nebuchadnezzar’s speech in the chapter, he uses Daniel’s Babylonian name exclusively. However, it is clear throughout the book that Daniel prefers his Hebrew name. The fact that his Hebrew name is used twice in this chapter, probably demonstrates that Daniel had a great influence on the composition and editing of this letter by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, as author of the book that bears his name, could also have been selective in his choices of wording and of what portions of the king’s speech and decrees to include in the biblical book. (CC)

Second, Nebuchadnezzar describes Daniel as a man in whom “a spirit of holy gods dwells.” None of the pagan king’s previous experiences with God’s power (evident in chapters 1, 2, and 3) had yet convinced him that the one true God was the only god who existed. Neither had he been led to believe in this God for his salvation. However, his prior experiences did convince him that some divine spirit dwelt in Daniel so that he could solve any mystery and interpret the dream. (CC)

The only other person so characterized in Scripture is Joseph, whom Pharaoh says is “a man in whom is a spirit of gods” (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ, Gen 41:38). That Daniel preserves this comment signals that he is drawing a parallel between Joseph and himself. Both were taken to a foreign land against their will. Both were called before the king to interpret a dream. Both had been successful at dream interpretation when the native wise men failed. Both served in high positions under pagan kings. (CC)

Why would Daniel draw this comparison? He wants to emphasize that the God of Israel—who protected Joseph, enabled him to prosper in Pharaoh’s court, and eventually led his own people out from bondage in Egypt—was still with his people exiled in Babylon, and eventually would deliver them from bondage there. God’s

protection of Daniel and Daniel's prosperity demonstrates that, despite the captivity, God is still powerful and effective on behalf of those whom he has chosen to be his own. Ultimately, this points to the "new exodus" theme throughout the OT, which is fulfilled in the "exodus" redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection (ἐξοδος, Lk 9:31). (CC)

In addition, there is another connection between the account of Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream: disaster brought by God comes in sevens. Joseph told of "seven years" of low harvests and famine (Genesis 41). Daniel speaks of "seven times" during which God will judge Nebuchadnezzar. (CC)

after the name of my god. See **note** on 1:7. Bel ("lord") was a title for the god Marduk. (CSB)

4:10–12 The gigantic tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was so great that it reached to heaven, provided sustenance for all creatures, and held everyone's attention. (TLSB)

4:10 *tree.* Interpreted in v. 22. (CSB)

A tree was a common symbol of cosmic life and well-being in the ancient Near East. Moreover, a tree is a common metaphor for persons or nations in the OT. The closest parallel is the cedar tree that represents Assyria and to which the Egyptian pharaoh is compared in Ezekiel 31. That tree also grew and was tall, was a nesting place for birds, had beasts under it, and provided shade. Like the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it was cut down because of its pride. Ezekiel's preaching appears to have taken place in mid-587 BC (Ezek 31:1). Since Nebuchadnezzar's dream took place no earlier than 573, it would be possible that Daniel knew of his fellow exile Ezekiel's use of the tree image and understood the parallel to Nebuchadnezzar when interpreting the dream. However, there are significant differences between the descriptions and final outcomes for the trees in Ezekiel and Daniel, so it would be overreaching to state that Daniel was dependent on Ezekiel. (CC)

4:11 *grew large and strong.* In one of Nebuchadnezzar's building inscriptions, Babylon is compared to a spreading tree (cf. v. 22). (CSB)

its top touched the sky. A phrase often used of Mesopotamian temple-towers (see also **note** on Ge 11:4). (CSB)

The tree "reached to heaven." To Daniel's original audience of Judean exiles, this would have signaled that the tree represented Babylon and its hubris, since this is parallel to the description of the plan for the tower of Babel (Gen 11:4). Moreover, since the tree "was visible to the end of the entire earth," it represented the prominence of Babylon as a world power. The various nationalities that came under Babylonian dominance are symbolized by the creatures for which it provides food and shelter. (CC)

4:12 FOUND SHELTER – “In its branches the birds of the sky dwell” is similar to the description of the shelter afforded by the kingdom of God in Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed (Mt 13:31–32 and parallels). However, Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom merely provided temporal security and physical necessities for earthly life, whereas the kingdom of God brought by Jesus provides eternal life. (CC)

4:13 *messenger*. Angel. See NIV text note. (CSB)

The second part of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is signaled by a short prose sentence (4:13) that repeats both the phrase “the visions of my head upon my bed” and the interjection וַיֵּן, “(and) behold,” from 4:10), the verse that introduced the first part of the dream. Apparently the angelic herald addresses other “watchers” (the plural) with the decree, since the imperatives “chop down ... strip ... leave” are plural, indicating that other angels are to carry out the decree. (CC)

4:14 CUT...TRIM...STRIP – The judgment is to fall on every aspect of the tree’s majesty: its height, its leaves and fruit, and the creatures that had taken refuge in and under it. (CC)

Chop ... lop ... strip ... scatter. Shows that the Most High rules (v 17). (TLSB)

4:15 *let the stump ... remain*. Implies that the tree will be revived later (see v. 26). (CSB)

Suggests possible regrowth (cf Is 11:1). (TLSB)

However, unlike the total destruction of the tree representing Babylon in Ezekiel 31, a special command is given to “leave” the stump (Dan 4:15). This is a sign of hope that the tree might once again sprout and grow (see Is 6:13; 11:1; Job 14:7). Yet, the tree is to be bound “with a band of iron and brass” (Dan 4:12 [ET 4:15]). It is difficult to discern what the purpose of the binding is. Some commentators view it as a reference to the physical or psychological restraints that would be placed on Nebuchadnezzar during his insanity, while others see it as a reassurance to Nebuchadnezzar that he would be preserved through his trial. (CC)

band of iron and bronze. To help preserve the stump. (TLSB)

him. Masculine pronoun indicates that the tree represented the king (v 22) (TLSB)

DRENCHED WITH DEW – At first the decree merely states that the stump will be with the grass, drenched with dew and among the wild animals (4:15). This is clarified in the following verse (4:16), where we are now told that the human mind that the tree originally possessed will be changed to an animal mind. (In the OT, the Hebrew and Aramaic terms for “heart” often refer to mental faculties and so correspond in meaning to the English “mind”) The type of mental illness in which a person thinks he is an animal and behaves accordingly is often called lycanthropy or zoanthropy. The

specific malady here is more properly called boanthropy, a human behaving like a bovine, The best known case of this kind of insanity in the modern era was that of King George III of Great Britain. (CC)

Having no shelter from moisture. Repeated in vv 25, 33. (TLSB)

4:16 *beast's mind.* Mental illness called “lycanthropy.” (TLSB)

seven. Signifies completeness. (CSB)

Exact time needed to effect change. Typically regarded as seven years, though the equating of “periods of time” and “years” is not absolutely certain. (TLSB)

The “seven times” (וְשִׁבְעָה עֲרֵבָיִם, 4:16) decreed for Nebuchadnezzar is most often understood as seven years. However, there many who hold that the period is purposely vague and ill-defined or, at least, indeterminate. There are at least seven good reasons to think that the simple equation of “times” with “years” is mistaken.

1. It is instructive to note that Daniel has already used “seven” as a number representing completeness or thoroughness (3:19) without it being literal. (CC)
2. The duration of the seven times is defined later in this chapter not in terms of years, but in terms of the time it will take for Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge that God is sovereign over the affairs of humans (4:26). (CC)
3. Thus it appears as if “seven” represents the time taken by God to create anew or re-create Nebuchadnezzar’s mind and spiritual disposition. This could allude to Genesis 1, in which God accomplished the first creation of the world (and rested) in seven days. This would also be in harmony with biblical themes that describe a spiritual new creation on the eighth day, the first day of a new week (since days were counted inclusively), such as circumcision (incorporation into the redeemed covenant people) on the eighth day (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3) and Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the new week (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1), marking the start of the new creation in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). (CC)
4. When relating the actual events during Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity, Daniel tells us that the king was insane “until his hair grew long like [the feathers of] eagles and his nails like [the claws of] birds” (4:33). This did not require a period of seven years, but could easily have transpired within a much shorter period, even within seven months. (CC)
5. The Aramaic word “time” (עֲרֵבָיִם) used in 4:16) is used elsewhere by Daniel in an undetermined (but finite) sense (2:8–9, 21; 7:12). (CC)
6. Since there are many parallels between Daniel in this account and Joseph, who interpreted Pharaoh’s dream as portending two periods of “seven years”

(see Genesis 41), we might expect Daniel too to refer to “seven years” when he interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. However, when Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he continues to use the phrase “seven times” (4:4:25, 32) from 4:16), and not “seven years,” which we would have expected if the “times” in 4:16) really represented years. It seems that Daniel purposely avoids the term “year” (absent from Daniel 4) when interpreting the dream. By doing so he draws a distinction between his situation and Joseph’s. (CC)

7. Finally, if the prophecy of “seven times” referred to an exact time period, we might expect Daniel’s record of Nebuchadnezzar’s letter to refer to this same exact time period that elapsed during his insanity, to confirm that the prophecy was fulfilled. Instead, the king uses the vague phrase (literally) “at the end of the days” (לְקֵץ יְמֵי הַיּוֹם, 4:34). (CC)

For all these reasons, the “seven times” are best taken to refer to an indeterminate, but clearly delimited period of time that was sufficient for God to accomplish his purpose to reform Nebuchadnezzar. It could have been seven years, but it just as easily could have been seven seasons, seven months, or seven periods in an unknown divine reckoning of time needed to re-create Nebuchadnezzar as a contrite and more humble monarch. (CC)

times. See NIV text note. The term referred to a given season of the year, and so to the year as a whole (see 7:25). For example, every recurrent spring meant that another full year had elapsed since the previous spring. Alternatively, “times” can refer to indefinite periods. (CSB)

4:17 *messengers.* The agents of God, who is the ultimate source (v. 24). (CSB)

This sentence of the angelic council (see notes, 1Ki 22:19; Jb 1:6) was meant to convince “the living ... that the Most High rules the kingdom of men.” (TLSB)

The OT occasionally depicts God as presiding over a heavenly council and conversing with the angels who are present (Ps 82:1; 1 Ki 22:19–23; cf. Job 1–2). Evidently, the decree came from this council of watchers, which is understood to be under God’s authority. It is clear in 1 Ki 22:19–23 that angels may express various proposals, but God has the final authority and makes the final decision about what history shall transpire, and he then decrees what the angels are to do to carry out his will (cf. Heb 1:7, 14). In Job 1–2 Satan enters the company of “the sons of God” (angels; Job 1:6) and proposes malicious actions, but God issues the final decree about what Satan is permitted to do and what he must not do. (CC)

4:18 **NONE OF WISE MEN** – When we read Nebuchadnezzar’s description of his dream (4:10–17), we may find it difficult to understand why the Babylonian wise men could not interpret it (4:4, 15 [ET 4:7, 18]). From the king’s description, it is clear that the tree represents a person (4:16) who has great influence throughout the world and dominance over others (4:11–12). The person depicted by the tree must be a king,

since he will be forced by his experience to acknowledge that God, not the king himself, is sovereign and gives kingdoms to whomever he wishes (4:17). (CC)

All this pointed to the dream as a prediction of judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. He is the one whom the tree represents. So why did the wise men not understand the dream? Part of the reason may be that they were not familiar with the preaching of Ezekiel to the Judean exiles (as Daniel may have been), since Ezekiel twice used a tree as a symbol for royalty in a lengthy prophecy of judgment (Ezekiel 17 and 31). Nor would they have been familiar with the symbol of a stump as hope for the future that remains despite divine judgment (Is 6:13; 11:1; Job 14:7). Yet, even without this knowledge, it should have been possible for them to piece together the clues in the description of the dream itself. (CC)

By recording their failure (as stated by Nebuchadnezzar), Daniel the author is implying that God blinded the pagan wise men so that they were unable to see what was obvious (cf. 1 Sam 2:9; Prov 4:19; 2 Cor 4:4). This leads to another parallel between Daniel and Joseph. The Joseph narratives in Genesis draw a clear distinction between the ability of God's chosen people (Jacob and his children) to interpret dreams and the inability of pagans to do so. When Joseph recounts his dream about sheaves in the field, his brothers do not need anyone to interpret it for them; they immediately recognize its meaning (Gen 37:5–8). Likewise, when Joseph has his dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars, his father Jacob immediately discerns its meaning without needing any interpreter (Gen 37:9–10). (CC)

When Joseph arrives in Egypt, he is the only one there who can understand dreams. The metaphorical dreams of the royal cupbearer and baker are not difficult to decipher, but the men cannot understand them (Genesis 40). Similarly, the two dreams of Pharaoh are simple comparisons, but only Joseph can discern their meanings (Genesis 41). In Daniel 4, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is full of clues as to its meaning, but of all the people in Nebuchadnezzar's court, only the lone Judean who trusts Yahweh can interpret them, because he alone has been enlightened by God instead of blinded by living in darkness and being trained in occult methods of divination. Only Daniel can see the light of God's glory in this dream, because only he is part of the new creation of God. True spiritual knowledge and enlightenment comes only by the grace of the one true and triune God, and simply through faith in him. Christians now see this glory fully in Christ, as Daniel foresaw him from afar (2:44–45; 7:13–14). "For God, who said, 'From darkness let light shine,' has shone in our hearts to give the enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). (CC)

4:4–18 In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the great tree overshadowing the whole world represents a ruler who would be humbled. He has to learn that God rules all earthly kingdoms. We need constantly to be reminded that, although earthly kingdoms have great power and authority, the Most High rules. Thankfully, He rules mercifully (cf vv 34–37). • Thank You, heavenly Father, for exalting Jesus to Your right hand, where He rules for the benefit of His Church. Amen. (TLSB)

Daniel Interprets the Dream

¹⁹ 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. ²³ “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: ²⁵ You 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. ²⁶ The 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. ²⁷ Therefore, 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.”

4:19 *Daniel ... was greatly perplexed.* Possibly over how to state the interpretation in an appropriate way. (CSB)

Daniel realized the dream’s meaning. (TLSB)

may the dream be ... for your enemies! Pious wish intended to prepare Nebuchadnezzar for the worst. (TLSB)

Daniel’s reaction to the dream is immediate and apparently is visible to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel knows that the dream portends judgment on the king for his arrogance, but he is reluctant to inform the monarch. Considering Nebuchadnezzar’s volatile temper and violent punishments of those who anger him (2:12; 3:19–22), this is understandable. However, Nebuchadnezzar, sensing Daniel’s unease, coaxes him to reveal the meaning of the dream. (CC)

Even when prevailed upon by the king to divulge the significance of the dream, Daniel is cautious to distance himself from its message of judgment. He demonstrates his loyalty to the king by wishing the judgment had fallen on Nebuchadnezzar’s enemies. This kind

of wish, used elsewhere in the OT (1 Sam 25:26; 2 Sam 18:32), is a subtle signal that the dream does not bear good news for the Babylonian ruler. (CC)

4:20-22 It would appear as if Daniel is being careful to follow the king's description to help ensure that the king regards his interpretation as valid. Daniel's attention to detail might reflect his experience in chapter 2, where the king required him first to recount the dream itself (which he had not told Daniel) to guarantee that the interpretation too (as well as the contents of the dream) was given to Daniel by divine revelation. (CC)

Just as Nebuchadnezzar inserted the repetitious "I was watching in the visions of my head upon my bed, and behold" (4:13a) between his description of the tree and the decree of the watchers, so Daniel, after his third-person description of the tree, begins his second-person address with "you are it, Your Majesty," and identifies the tree as representing the king (4:22) before he elaborates the divine decree (4:23–26). Daniel includes enough complimentary explanation in 4:22 so as to avoid unnecessarily arousing the king's wrath. Unlike his description of this event years later, when he will describe this tree as representing not only Nebuchadnezzar but also his arrogance (5:20), here he does not refer directly to Nebuchadnezzar's hubris, but leaves that part of the description implied by the tree imagery (cf. Is 2:12–13; 10:33–34; Ezekiel 31). Daniel's diplomatic language enables him to continue to speak with Nebuchadnezzar, to challenge him to repent and reform (Dan 4:27), and ultimately to lead the king to appreciate (to some degree) God's sovereignty. (CC)

4:21 *leaves ... fruit.* Luth: "For the righteous lords and princes this is also a comforting and lovely image, that God the Lord depicts even this tyrannical king as a beautiful tree which nourishes all the beasts and lets them rest in its shade. Hereby God makes it clear that through civil authority [*Oberkeit*] he provides and maintains peace and tranquility, protection and defense, sustenance and possessions, and this entire temporal life, and that it is pleasing to him wherever a lord or prince practices his office conscientiously For these are fine fruits, fine leaves, fine foliage, Daniel [4:21–22] says; that is, these are precious, noble, good works. Because it is so pleasing to God himself that he thus portrays, praises, and adorns it, a lord should indeed exercise his office with all eagerness and delight, even though it be full of toil and trouble. By the same token, we too ought not to pay attention to how evil the tyrants may be but to how precious and useful is the office which they have from God, instituted for our benefit and welfare" (AE 35:297–98). (TLSB)

4:22 *it is you, O king.* Nebuchadnezzar's life parallels that of the tree. (TLSB)

ends of the earth. Hyperbole, although the empire did reach from the Great Sea to the Persian Gulf. (TLSB)

4:23 **YOU...SAW** – As he did with the description of the tree, Daniel also repeats Nebuchadnezzar's description of the decree of the watcher (4:10b–14) in 4:23). He expounds its meaning for the king in 4:24–26). However, in recounting the watcher Daniel omits much more of Nebuchadnezzar's description than he did for the tree. While a few of the omissions are minor, there are two major omissions and changes: (CC)

1. Instead of describing in detail the destruction of the tree—its branches, leaves, and fruit—and the scattering of the animals and birds (4:14), Daniel simply substitutes “destroy it” (4:23). (CC)
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation from having a human mind to an animal mind (4:13 [ET 4:16]) is omitted. (CC)
3. Daniel, in his explanation of the decree, will tell Nebuchadnezzar that he will be restored to his rule when he acknowledges God’s rule (4:25–26), but Daniel does not mention the additional revelation to Nebuchadnezzar in 4:17) that God appoints “the lowliest of humans” to rule over the human kingdom. (CC)

Daniel is, therefore, continuing his diplomatic language. He avoids repeating some things whose application should now be obvious to the king. A lack of tact by Daniel at this point could cause the king to refuse to listen to Daniel’s exhortation to repentance (4:27) or cause him to become infuriated. Therefore, Daniel abbreviates the long description of the tree’s destruction, sparing the king as much embarrassment before his courtiers as possible. Probably for the same reason Daniel mentions that the king will live with the animals, but he omits a direct reference to his insanity (the loss of his human mind). Finally, by not repeating that God gives the kingdom to the lowliest of humans, Daniel avoids the equation of Nebuchadnezzar with a lowly person, thereby preserving Nebuchadnezzar’s royal honor. (CC)

4:24 MOST HIGH – Daniel begins his interpretation with another change that subtly reinforces a key theological point: God is in charge. Instead of referring to the singular “watcher” in 4:13) or the plural “watchers” in 4:17), Daniel directly tells Nebuchadnezzar that the judgment “is a decree of the Most High” (4:24); cf. also 4:25). Daniel thus confesses the truth that there is only one God. He speaks from his monotheistic viewpoint without offending the king, while at the same time hoping to move him away from his pagan assumptions. The king may have interpreted the “watcher” and “watchers” not as angelic beings, but as gods. Unfortunately, however, it is clear from Nebuchadnezzar’s references to the “gods” (in the letter that he composed after his restoration to sanity and to his throne) that he did not abandon his pagan beliefs. He equated the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, with “a spirit of holy gods” (4:8–9, 18). (CC)

4:25 *acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign.* He learned the lesson (compare v. 30 with v. 37). (CSB)

driven from among men. Nebuchadnezzar was banished from society, just as Adam and Eve were cast out of Paradise. (TLSB)

till you know. The king needed to learn that he ruled only by the will of the Most High. (TLSB)

The interpretation continues with a brief description of Nebuchadnezzar’s coming insanity and a reminder that it will last until the king acknowledges God’s absolute rule instead of his own. The time of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity is once again said to be

“seven times” (4:25). Here Daniel had an opportunity to clarify what was meant by “times” but did not, reinforcing the notion that the period is ordained by God for reforming the king—an indeterminate but finite length of time (CC)

4:26 *Heaven*. A Jewish title for God, later reflected in the NT expression “kingdom of heaven” (compare Mt 5:3 with Lk 6:20). (CSB)

Finally, Daniel interprets the stump and gives Nebuchadnezzar some hope by telling him that it means that he can retain the kingdom when he knows that Heaven rules (4:26). It should be noted that Daniel does not mention the iron and brass band on the stump (4:15). Since Daniel has avoided details that would embarrass Nebuchadnezzar, this may indicate that the metal band represented physical restraints that would have to be used on the king to control him during his insanity. Daniel conveniently avoids the subject of the band on the stump, and Nebuchadnezzar is not anxious to explore its meaning with him. (CC)

4:27 ACCEPT MY ADVICE – Daniel’s exhortation to the king is designed to bring him to repentance. It is a forceful word of Law and Gospel. The prophet does not shrink from forthrightly calling the king’s attention to “your sins” and “your iniquities” and his need to “break away from” them. These indicate the second use of the Law: to convict the sinner of his sin and need for forgiveness by God. Daniel states that the cure by which this sin can be removed is God’s gift of imputed “righteousness.” This gift would bring about a change in his arrogant attitude that would be demonstrated by righteous deeds, especially with “showing mercy to the poor.” Throughout Scripture, God calls his people to give evidence of their repentance and faith by caring for the poor and disadvantaged. Indeed, Jesus issued such a call to a rich man who wanted to follow him (Mt 19:21). Showing mercy to the poor reflects God’s own generosity toward all. If the king would do this, it would be a tacit acknowledgement that he himself is no better before God than the lowliest of the poor. Indeed, all people are mere beggars before God. (CC)

The exhortation to repentance, the offer of righteousness through faith, and the call for resulting good works are accompanied by a possible (but not certain) temporal reward: “perhaps your prosperity will be prolonged” (4:27). The prophets often include the offer of a reprieve from punishment if people repent (e.g., Amos 5:15; Joel 2:14). However, the king persisted in his arrogance (Dan 4:27), and the prophecy of judgment in his dream was fulfilled. Nevertheless, God displays the enormity of his mercy when he later does restore the king to his throne and glory (4:36-37). This does not necessarily mean that Nebuchadnezzar was converted to saving faith. God can bestow temporal rewards on unbelievers through their exercise of human reason, as the Lutheran Confessions affirm (Ap IV 24–25). What is evident from the king’s letter is that God humbled the monarch so that he recognized that even kings are lowly before God, “the Most High ... who lives forever” (4:34). Just as God has the authority to exalt the lowliest of people (4:17), so also no one can question or thwart his ability to humble the arrogant (4:35, 37). (CC)

Call to repentance. “Daniel knew that the forgiveness of sins in Christ was promised not only to the Israelites, but also to all nations. Otherwise, he could not have promised to the king the forgiveness of sins. For without God’s sure Word about His will, a person has no power to claim, especially when terrified by sin, that God ceases to be angry” (Ap V 141). Cyr Jer: “The LORD is loving unto man, and swift to pardon, but slow to punish. Let no man therefore despair of his own salvation” (NPNF 2 7:13). (TLSB)

prosperity. Cf v 4. (TLSB)

4:19–27 Daniel interprets the dream for the king and urges him to repent. Today, God does not normally use dreams to make clear His will that we repent, for He has given us the Scriptures, which are filled with such admonitions. To all who repent, God promises prosperity even greater than Nebuchadnezzar’s: forgiveness of sins and eternal rest in heaven. • Holy God, I repent of my sins and plead for Your mercy. Grant me the rich blessing of Your Word of life. Amen. (TLSB)

The Dream Is Fulfilled

²⁸ 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?” ³¹ The 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.” ³³ Immediately 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. ³⁴ At 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. ³⁵ All 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?” ³⁶ At 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.

4:28 *All this happened.* But only because Nebuchadnezzar did not follow Daniel’s advice. (CSB)

4:29 *twelve months*. Significant time elapsed with no change in Nebuchadnezzar's attitude. (TLSB)

Nebuchadnezzar's insanity strikes one year after the dream (4:29). Daniel emphasizes that the king was in Babylon, a detail that seems unneeded. (Where else would the palace be?) However, this is Daniel's way of tying the setting of the fulfillment of the dream to the place where the dream was first received (4:4), implying that Nebuchadnezzar had twelve more months during which he continued to be "at ease ... and flourishing" (4:4) in his palace in Babylon. At any time during this full year, he could have followed Daniel's exhortation to repent and receive righteousness (4:27). God was more than patient with the king! (CC)

4:30 *great Babylon*. Illustrated, e.g., in the city's ramparts, temples and hanging gardens (see [note](#) on Isa 13:19). (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar admired the many fine buildings for which he was famous, including one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Hanging Gardens. Under his reign, Babylon was 2 mi by 1.5 mi and completely enclosed by a high defensive wall with beautiful gates. (TLSB)

However, Nebuchadnezzar retained his arrogance. His rhetorical question to himself demonstrates his self-centered hubris: "Isn't this the great Babylon that I built for a royal residence by the might of *my* power and for the glory of *my* majesty?" (4:30). Nebuchadnezzar is known to have built and beautified Babylon and is credited with the construction of the famous Hanging Gardens, which were a present to his Median wife to remind her of her mountainous homeland. The problem with Nebuchadnezzar was his arrogance in taking credit for this without acknowledging that God had given him the office of king and had also given him all the power and abilities he possessed. He did not undertake these projects for the good of his people, much less for the glory of the God whose surpassing power to save his people had been demonstrated to him on several occasions. Instead, he did them for the glory of *his own* majesty. (CC)

4:31 *The words were still on his lips*. See Lk 12:19–20. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar had barely finished speaking when he heard God's voice of judgment. (TLSB)

Although God had been patient, Nebuchadnezzar's words were too much, and Daniel tells us that the king had barely finished speaking them when the judgment fell upon him. For a similar judgment in the NT, see Acts 12:21–23. The voice from heaven (Dan 4:31–32) not only signals the gravity of the situation in a miraculous form, but it repeats key elements from the dream (4:15–16, 23, 25) so that there could be no misunderstanding as to who was judging Nebuchadnezzar. It was "the Most High," the God of Israel, who had also given both dreams (chapters 2 and 4) to the king and who had enabled his prophet Daniel to provide the interpretations. (CC)

4:33 *what had been said ... was fulfilled*. See Pr 16:18. (CSB)

driven away. Possibly into the palace gardens. His counselors, perhaps led by Daniel (see 2:48–49), could have administered the kingdom efficiently. (CSB)

eagles' feathers. Could refer to vultures. Such birds of prey may have feathers more than a foot long. (TLSB)

Daniel's description of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity initially follows the description of the dream by Nebuchadnezzar. However, instead of referring to "seven times" as the duration of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity (4:16, 23, 25, 32), Daniel tells us that the king's insanity lasted until he had long hair and nails (4:33). Therefore, the "seven times" could not have been as short as seven days, but could well have been less than the often-assumed seven years. (CC)

4:28–33 Since Nebuchadnezzar goes on living as before, the decree of the Most High (v 24) comes to pass. For a period of time, he lives like a beast. This is to be a learning experience for him. God may also allow trouble and illness in our lives to discipline us for our good (Heb 12:3–11). When this happens, we may trust His loving purpose and call on Him for strength and healing. • Loving Lord, when I experience trouble in my life, comfort me with the remembrance of what You suffered for my healing and salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

4:34 *His dominion ... from generation to generation.* See v. 3; 6:26; 7:14. (CSB)

Seven periods of time completed (vv 16, 25). (TLSB)

lifted my eyes to heaven. Nebuchadnezzar had learned his lesson. (TLSB)

I blessed the Most High. His praise resumed (v 3) and was sincere. (TLSB)

"At the end of the time" (see the first textual note on 4:34) appointed for his insanity, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God by lifting his eyes "to heaven." In this case, "heaven" may be a circumlocution for God, as it is elsewhere in this chapter (4:26), and frequently in Matthew's Gospel. Immediately after the return of his sanity, he confesses God's sovereignty. His acknowledgment fulfills the condition specified by God for lifting the curse (4:17, 25–26). Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar continues his acknowledgement of God by implicitly admitting that he is nothing before God (since he is one of the inhabitants of the earth), and that God does whatever he wishes (4:35). Although not directly stating that all he had previously accomplished was a result of God's blessing, Nebuchadnezzar admits he was wrong to glorify himself for his accomplishments (4:30). God's power is absolute and beyond challenge—something that Nebuchadnezzar previously maintained about his own power (3:15). (CC)

4:35 *host of heaven.* Army of angels. (TLSB)

4:36 See Job 42:10, 12. (CSB)

kingdom ... returned. When Nebuchadnezzar's reason returned, he also resumed his kingly rule. (TLSB)

counselors ... sought me. Government was back to normal. (TLSB)

4:37 *all His works ... just.* This earthly king acknowledged that the King of heaven had treated him as he deserved. (TLSB)

those who walk in pride he is able to humble. See Pr 3:34; Jas 4:10; 1Pe 5:5–6 (CSB)

Mary expressed the same thought in her Magnificat (Lk 1:52). (TLSB)

Like he did in the previous section, here Nebuchadnezzar indirectly acknowledges God's power over him. In this case, he states that his reason and the glory of his kingdom "returned" to him, and he was "reinstated" (see the textual note on 4:36) over his kingdom, in keeping with the promise God gave to him when Daniel interpreted the dream (4:26). The unstated agent behind those verbs is God: since the kingdom, power, and glory belong to him, they are his gifts to those privileged to hold a high office on earth. (CC)

The king continues by confessing that "all" God's "works are true and his ways are just. All who walk in arrogance he is able to humble" (4:37). The reader of the letter is to conclude that since all of God's ways are just and God can humble everyone who is arrogant, his ways with Nebuchadnezzar were just and Nebuchadnezzar was among the arrogant, but now is humbled. However, by casting these thoughts in a doxology, the king is able to confess this without directly admitting his faults to his subjects. (CC)

4:34–37 After Nebuchadnezzar "lifted [his] eyes to heaven," his reason and the glory of his kingdom returned. He praised the King of heaven, who is able to humble those who walk in pride. As a disciple of Jesus, take to heart the words of Peter: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you" (1Pt 5:6). • Jesus, You humbled Yourself for me. Give me the same mind, that all I say and do may glorify You. Amen. (TLSB)