

Taming the Wild Beast, Part 1 Daniel 4

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I. The King's Proclamation (vv. 1 – 3)

Verses 1 – 3 are both a *decree* and a *doxology*. Normally, a doxology comes at the end of a story. However, Nebuchadnezzar has been so amazed and filled with gratitude by what God has done for him, that he wants the conclusion of the story to serve as the introduction.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was vast, encompassing many different "peoples," cultures, and "languages." It is to every one of these subjects that this decree is issued. He sent out this proclamation to the entire civilized world.

In **verse 2**, Nebuchadnezzar refers to "the signs and wonders that...God has done for me." This is very personal, and you must admire the king's courage. This is a very humiliating experience that he will publicly announce to his entire realm. But he didn't care because he was a changed man. He says, "It has seemed good to me" to share this good news of what God had done for him. ***This should be the attitude of every believer.*** It is a joy to tell the world what the Lord has done for us. It is a privilege to tell the world about our Savior (**1 Peter 2:9**). Has God done something *wonderful* and *excellent* for you? Then, by all means make a decree! Be resolved to tell the world about Him!

The words of **verse 3** come from a pagan king who once believed *his* kingdom would endure forever. A king who once said, "And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (**3:15**) Therefore, this proclamation is a result of a work of grace in Nebuchadnezzar's heart.

II. The King's Trepidation (vv. 4 – 18)

In **verse 4**, the word for "ease" (*šēlēh*) means 'at rest,' or 'free from *apprehension* and *fear*.' It conveys a feeling of security. The word for "prospering" (*ra' ānān*) means 'to grow green,' meaning everything was flourishing and luxuriant. We might say, "Everything was just lovely." Therefore, there were no outside threats to Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom at this time, and there was no inner turmoil or political drama. Instead, there was peace throughout his realm. **Verse 30** seems to indicate the king's building projects were complete.

Taken together, the clues in **verses 4 and 30** suggest the king's second dream occurred toward the close of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, some scholars say around 570 B.C. This would place it around 25-30 years after the fiery furnace in **Daniel 2**, and it would mean that Nebuchadnezzar was around 70 years of age and Daniel was around 50.

Suddenly, in **verse 5**, the king's restful, peaceful, carefree life came to a screeching halt. You can see the great contrast between Nebuchadnezzar's state of mind in **verses 4 - 5**. Now the king was unsure of his future or the future of his kingdom.

This hits so close to home, doesn't it? One day, the sun is shining. A gentle, cool breeze blows in your face. One day everything is great and the next day, wham! Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a divine finger touches the calm waters of your life and the waves become contrary.

The danger of those peaceful times is that we become spiritually lax and God uses the waves to get us back on track; perhaps to make us serious about spiritual growth again. It is during these times we are reminded of how fragile we are. *We are reminded of who He is and who we truly are.*

The same can be true for unbelievers. God will take drastic steps to shoot a warning shot across their bow that screams, “Look to Me!” This is what is happening to Nebuchadnezzar. “Ease” and “prospering” had become an obstacle to the work of God in the king’s life. And now that’s all about to change.

In **verses 6 – 7** we see that Nebuchadnezzar still had his mind set on the flesh. In his pride, he refused to admit the futility of his own religion and belief system. Therefore, the king seeks an “interpretation” from his bumbling, incompetent, polytheistic “wise men.” Not surprisingly, those considered the best and brightest in the kingdom were unable to “make known to [the king] its interpretation.”

In **verse 8**, the words “at last” may be an indication that some time had passed before Daniel came into the king’s presence. We also see that at this juncture, the king continues to be a polytheist even though he had acknowledged Yahweh’s sovereignty twice before (**2:47; 3:28 – 29**).

Nebuchadnezzar refers to Daniel as “chief of the magicians.” However, this doesn’t mean that Daniel was their boss, but that he was the wisest and most capable.

In **verses 10 – 12**, Nebuchadnezzar “saw...a tree” in the *middle* “of the earth.” This symbolizes that compared to the rest “of the earth” this “tree” was in a position of utmost importance.

This “tree” was *so* tall, and stretched *so* high, that it was “visible to the end of the whole earth.” In addition to its staggering “height,” the “leaves” of this “tree...were beautiful.” However, it was not only pleasing to the eye, this “tree” was also *useful*. It was a source of “food for all.” It provided *shelter* and *security* for “the beasts of the field” and “the birds of the heavens.” In fact, “all flesh was fed from it.”

In ancient times, it wasn’t unusual for a “tree” to symbolize men, great rulers, and their kingdoms (e.g. **Psalm 1:3; Ezekiel 17:22 – 24; 31:1 – 11**). Other extra-biblical sources make similar comparisons. This fact would *not* have been lost on Nebuchadnezzar.

In **verse 13**, Nebuchadnezzar says, “behold.” It’s another way of saying, “*Look!*” This means the king was surprised. He was astonished by what he saw.

The Aramaic word for “watcher” (*ir*), means “one who is awake.” It refers to a *guardian* who is both *watchful* and *vigilant*. This creature is also described as “holy;” as “one [who] came down from heaven.” So, this was Nebuchadnezzar’s way of describing an angel. **Ezekiel 1:18** says that cherubs are “full of eyes all around.” So, the king is describing a creature who has been set apart by God to watch over the affairs and activities of men. This “watcher” had been observing Nebuchadnezzar’s life and saw how he failed to meet God’s standard of holiness.

In **verse 14**, the tree is chopped down and stripped of “its branches” and “leaves.” “Its fruit” scattered. This will obviously force “the beasts...and the birds” to “flee” to seek food, shelter, and security somewhere else. In **verse 15** we learn that while the “tree” is ruined, it will not be killed. It is protected by “a band of iron and bronze.”

At the end of **verse 15**, this “tree” is referred to as a “him.” This man will be forced to live outdoors, exposed to the elements. His diet will consist of “grass” like the “beasts.”

In **verse 16**, the “watcher” says this man will not only ***live*** like “the beasts,” and ***eat*** like “the beasts,” but he will also ***think*** like “the beasts,” and ***act*** like “the beasts.” This judgment would last for “seven periods of time” or “seven” years.

In **verse 17**, the same heavenly creature who had pronounced judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar now provides him with the reason for it.

The message of the dream is that though “the kings of the earth set themselves...against the LORD,” (**Psalm 2**), God reigns! It is God who raises up rulers and their kingdoms, and it is God who brings them back down.

Sinclair Ferguson says of this judgment, “A superhuman empire would be reduced to subhuman proportions.”

As the Lord’s half-brother says in **James 4:6**, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

In **verse 18**, with the contents of the dream having been told to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar awaits and listens with confidence for its interpretation.