

# He Does Whatever He Pleases

God's Sovereignty and a King's Humility

ESV Daniel 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!

<sup>2</sup> It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the **Most High God** has done for me.

<sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

<sup>4</sup> I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.

<sup>5</sup> I saw **a dream** that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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,

<sup>9</sup> "**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.

<sup>10</sup> The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great.

<sup>11</sup> The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

<sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

<sup>13</sup> "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.

<sup>14</sup> He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

<sup>15</sup> But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.

<sup>17</sup> The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.'

<sup>18</sup> This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And [you, O Belteshazzar](#), tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

<sup>19</sup> 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!

<sup>20</sup> 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,

<sup>21</sup> 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--

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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,'

<sup>24</sup> this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>29</sup> At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,

<sup>30</sup> 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?"

<sup>31</sup> 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,

<sup>32</sup> 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."

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> 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;

<sup>35</sup> 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?"

<sup>36</sup> 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.

<sup>37</sup> 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.

(Daniel 4:1-37)

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## The Sovereign King

The Bible teaches a doctrine commonly referred to as [predestination](#). The old English word comes from a Latin word *praedestinationem*. It is literally “a determining beforehand” from the words *prae* “[before](#)” (see pre-) and *destinare* (destiny) “[appoint, determine](#).” The idea is that God predetermines or decrees everything that comes to pass (LBC 3.1); things are not brought about by chance or by fate or by something apart from his will. The Greek equivalent [proorizo](#) (προορίζω) is found several times in the NT, making it is a

**thoroughly biblical concept.** In fact, you can make a case that in one form or another, it is in every book of the Bible.

While the OT does not contain this Greek word, it most certainly does contain **the concept.** Theologians usually classify it under the doctrine of God’s “sovereignty.” Sovereignty is a word that belongs to **kings** and **their power.** God is King of heaven and earth and therefore his sovereign rule extends everywhere. To put that in kingly terms: **God reigns.** **J. I. Packer** says,

The assertion of God’s absolute sovereignty in creation, providence, and grace is basic to biblical belief and biblical praise. The vision of **God on the throne**—that is, **ruling**—**recurs** (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:2; cf. Pss. 11:4; 45:6; 47:8–9; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 3:21); and we are constantly told in explicit terms that the Lord (Yahweh) **reigns as king, exercising dominion over great and tiny things alike** (Exod. 15:18; Pss. 47; 93; 96:10; 97; 99:1–5; 146:10; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Dan. 4:34–35; 5:21–28; 6:26; Matt. 10:29–31). **God’s dominion is total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **J. I. Packer**, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 33.

Notice here that we are told about and shown God's sovereignty because it is basic to [biblical praise](#). In other words, [worship](#) belongs properly only to one who is sovereign, to the one who controls all things, does all that he pleases, and whom no one can thwart. Worship, by definition, is the giving of praise and bowing down to the One who is like this; it is an acknowledgement that God alone is worthy, because God alone is sovereign over all things, big or small or anywhere in between.

## Daniel 4: Summary and Outline

Already, in this discussion, several features of Daniel 4 have been foreshadowed. [Kings, dominion, sovereignty, and worship are all integral to this chapter](#). This is the fourth and final chapter dealing with [king Nebuchadnezzar](#)—the mighty monarch of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is the king, the sovereign not only of a city, but of the entire known world. He is the most powerful man who has ever lived on planet earth up to this point in recorded history, controlling more land and more people than anyone before him. As such, he is considered the sovereign ruler of the world.

For three chapters, this king has received increasingly [greater revelations of God Most High](#). In the [first chapter](#), *we*

learned something the king did not seem to understand firsthand—that God is the giver of all wisdom and knowledge, that he is therefore **himself all-wise and all-knowing**, and that he provides for his people in marvelous ways, even when they are in a foreign land under the rule and power of foreign gods. What is made known to us in that chapter becomes clear to the king **in the next** when he learns first-hand of God’s **omniscience**. God knew the secret dream of the king and made it known to his servant Daniel. Not only this, he learned that this God is sovereign over history and that through a coming “Stone,” he would destroy his own kingdom, the kingdoms of several later nations, and build his own eternal kingdom through a coming King. In **the third chapter**, Nebuchadnezzar came to realize that this God is **powerful** to save his people in any manner he chooses, even if it defies all physical laws like capital punishment in fire. As such, he is also a kind and gracious God.

This mighty king has also **said some very interesting things about this God** of the Jews. **The first chapter** has him silent, for he only sees *the results* of God’s wisdom and providential oversight of his people as the Jewish men rise to the top of the class while staying faithful to God’s laws. In **the next**, he makes a confession. **“Truly, your God is God of gods**

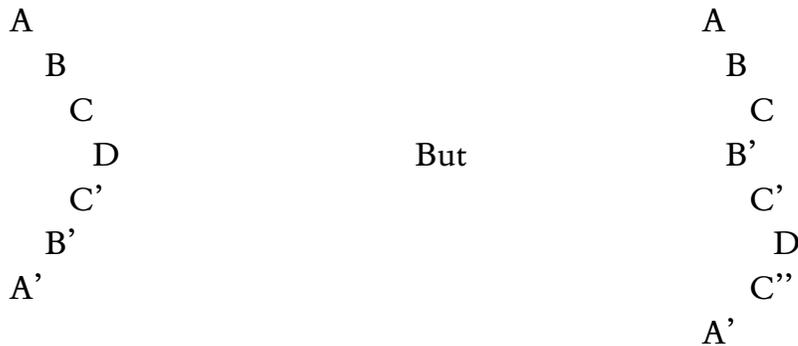
and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries” (Dan 2:47). But this confession was not combined with faith in God. It took the next chapter and the mighty deliverance of the faithful men of God who were willing to suffer death rather than forsake the LORD in the fiery furnace for the king to now confess, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him ... there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way” (3:28-29).

We might think that this was a confession of faith now, and it is certainly possible that it was. But along comes chapter four to finish our Nebuchadnezzar cycle in a way that makes me wonder. The chapter has the king dreaming again. This time, he dreams of a huge tree that is chopped down. He is greatly troubled by the dream and wants someone to interpret it. Along comes Daniel again, and what is revealed to the king becomes the final stage of this man’s conversion, for the one thing he still lacked was humility. And wow, does he get a dose of it now.

There are two features of the outline of the chapter that I want to highlight. The first is its structure. While it is

possible to say that the chapter has another chiasm,<sup>2</sup> it is probably better to refer to it as we can a book like Leviticus, as a ring.

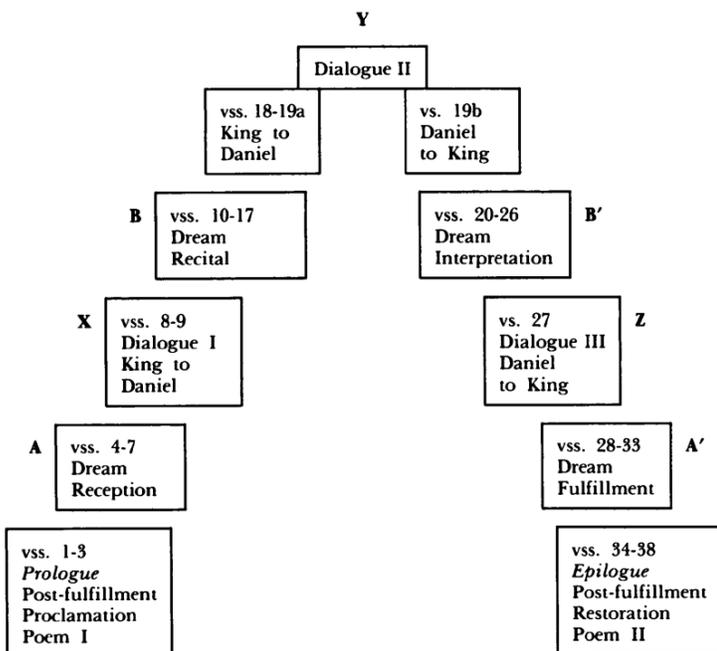
Strictly speaking, its structure does not seem to be:



It repeats its themes, it does have a center, its ending and beginning latch onto one another like a ring, but it takes its own unique way of getting there. We can outline it like this:

<sup>2</sup> See William H. Shea, "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2-7: An Analysis of Daniel 4," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23.2 (Summer 1985): 202. This outline felt unnatural to me. <https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/AUSS/1985-2/1985-2-06.pdf>.

**THE CHIASTIC LITERARY STRUCTURE OF DANIEL 4**



**A. Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the True God (4:1-3)**

**B. Troubling Dream (4:4-9)**

**C. The Dream (4:10-17)**

- a. The greatness of the tree
- b. The tree to be cut down
- c. The purpose

**B'. Troubling Interpretation (4:18-19)**

**C'. The Interpretation (4:20-26)**

- a. The great tree
- b. The tree to be cut down
- c. The purpose
- b'. the tree cut down
- c'. The purpose accomplished

**D. Exhortation (4:27)**

**C''. The Fulfilment (4:28-36)**

- a. The great tree
- b. The tree to be cut down
- c. The purpose

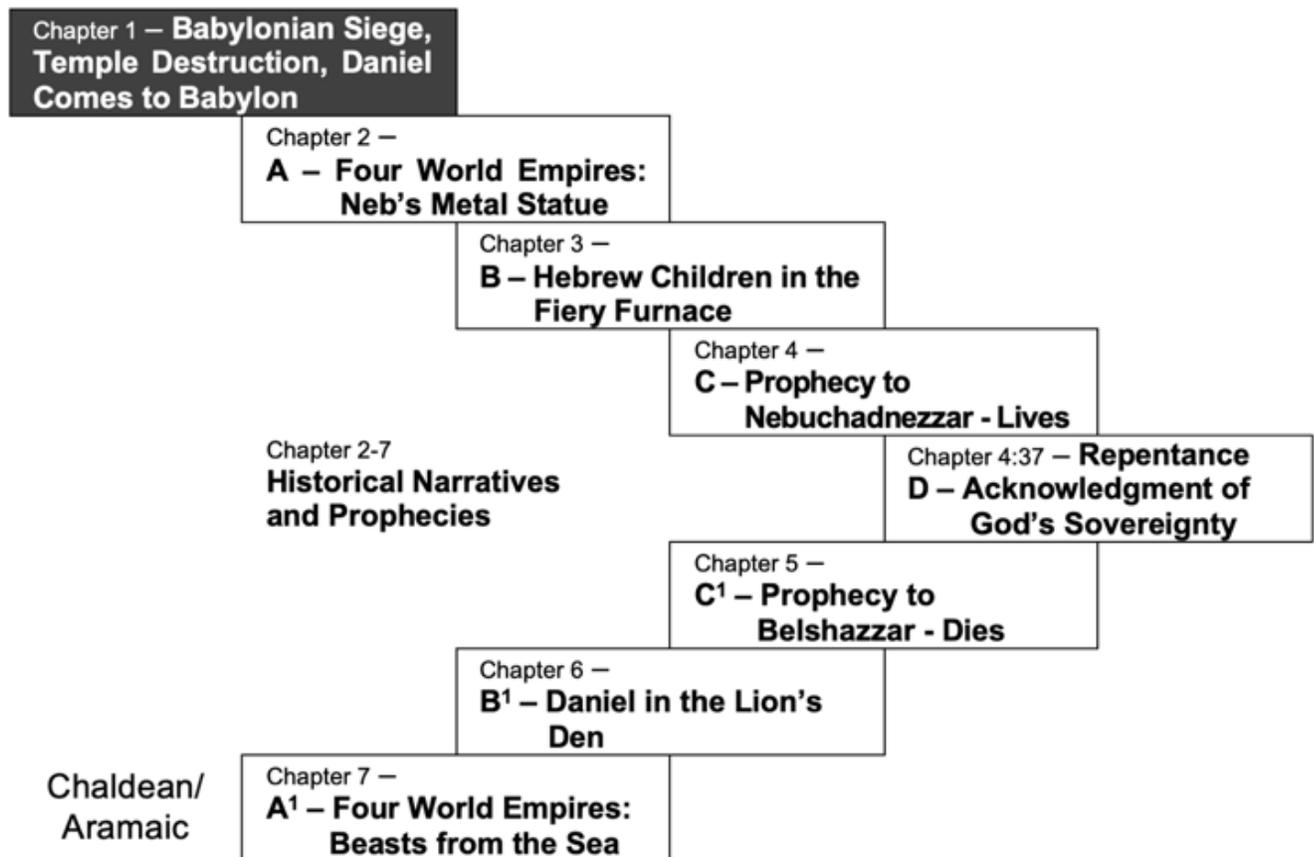
**A'. Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the True God (4:37)<sup>3</sup>**

In reading it this way, the only place without parallelism is **vs. 27** which is Daniel's **exhortation to the king to turn from his sins and practice righteousness** and perhaps God will lengthen his prosperity. That's classic Daniel. Highlighting some kind of confession of faith or Messianic prophecy or call to repentance. There is so much we can learn from studying the Bible's own literary structures about the things God himself considers the most important things.

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<sup>3</sup> This excellent outline is anonymous and found at "Daniel 4," *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Oct 30, 2018), <http://www.chiasmusxchange.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Daniel-4.pdf>. Someone has attempted a chiasm here.

Speaking of this, the second aspect of the chapter to call to your attention is a reminder of the **overall chiasm that makes up chs. 1-7**.



In this chiasm, we have **one central unit**, which also happens to fall in our story today. In this case, it is at **the end of the chapter** in **vv. 37** (or by extension, perhaps **vv. 34-37**). And guess what its subject is? The conclusion of Nebuchadnezzar’s humility and his acknowledgement that **God is Sovereign** and does whatever he wants. In this way, this topic becomes the central theme of the first half of the entire book!

# Daniel 4: The Humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar

## *Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the True God (4:1-3)*

The chapter is told from the point of view of Nebuchadnezzar. He is the speaker of the story. It begins with a preface. “King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation” (Dan 4:1-3). It is an acknowledgement that Nebuchadnezzar has in fact been converted, and it acts as a bookend to the very last verses. In between, we are to learn how it finally happened.

A word about the title for God here is in order. Most High God is what this king had called God in 3:36. It is the Aramaic *Illay Elah*. *Illay* is equivalent to *Elyon* (Most High), and *Elah* is equivalent to *Eloah* or *El* (God).

“Most High” is generally the term that Gentiles use for God in the OT and it refers in their thinking to the high god of the pantheon. For instance, in Canaanite thinking, El is

the Most High who, along with his consort Asherah, has seventy “sons of God.” However, it is also an **title** and at some point, one of his sons, Baal, becomes the “Most High,” usurping El on his throne.<sup>4</sup> Babylonian religion is similar but with different names.

The Bible teaches the same thing in places like **Deuteronomy 32:7-9** with **two vital differences**. First, the Most High has no consort. He simply creates the sons of God by his eternal Word. Second, his Word is in fact the uncreated Son of God, equal in essence to the Most High—very God of very God. In this way, Scripture can refer to the Most High as Father (**Deut 32:7**) or to the Son, and importantly, the one does not depose the other, for they are the One True God. Given the context of Daniel 3 and the one of like a son of the gods walking in the fiery furnace, and that the phrase is a title rather than a name, it seems to me that Nebuchadnezzar probably has at this moment the one we would call the Son of God in mind.

He says that the Most High God has shown him signs and wonders that are both great and mighty. And these

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<sup>4</sup> **E. E. Elnes** and P. D. Miller, “Elyon,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 293–299.

caused him to confess that His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion endures forever. Besides those already seen by this king in the first three chapters, this leads us to consider the signs and wonders in mind in Ch. 4.

### *A Troubling Dream (4:4-9)*

The story begins in **vs. 4** with Nebuchadnezzar **at ease and prospering** in his palace. **Palace** can be translated as “**temple**” or the sanctuary portion of the palace, which often included an actual garden.<sup>5</sup> This is relevant for two reasons. First, Nebuchadnezzar was **the builder of the fabled Hanging Gardens** of Babylon, one of Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Second, the contents of what we are about to see described will remind us very much of **the Garden of Eden**.

These contents involve a dream that made the king **afraid (5)**. He was sleeping in his bed and had “**fancies and visions**” that alarmed him. So, like before, he made a decree. But unlike ch. 2, where he demanded the dream itself be told

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<sup>5</sup> See **Carla Sulzbach**, “Nebuchadnezzar in Eden? Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 28,” in *Stimulation for Leiden BEAT 54*, ed. Hermann Michael Niemann and Matthias Augustin (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2004): 130.  
[https://www.academia.edu/884160/Nebuchadnezzar\\_in\\_Eden\\_Daniel\\_4\\_and\\_Ezekiel\\_28\\_by\\_Carla\\_Sulzbach](https://www.academia.edu/884160/Nebuchadnezzar_in_Eden_Daniel_4_and_Ezekiel_28_by_Carla_Sulzbach).

to him, he brings all the wise men of Babylon before him so that they could simply **make known the interpretation** (6). This lesser test shows that he now knows there is at least someone who will tell him the truth, and he has put him in charge of the wise men (2:48).

When the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers came in, the king told them his dream, but **no one could interpret it** for him (7). They've apparently learned their lesson about giving false interpretations. Finally, **Daniel comes in** and it reminds him that Nebuchadnezzar has renamed him "**Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—**" (8). This is showing us that **Nebuchadnezzar has not forsaken the worship of his gods** (chiefly, Bel-Marduk) yet, even though he acknowledges that Daniel is definitely distinct from the wise men.

He tells Belteshazzar-Daniel the dream (8b). And this is what he said. "**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**" (9a). This sounds like the same test as before, a demand to know the dream itself. But this is not what happens.

## *The Dream Recounted (4:10-17)*

The king continues by recounting his own dream for Daniel. “The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great” (10). Think here about the trees of the Garden of Eden, especially the two special trees of Life and the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In a symbolic sense, these trees are reflecting an ancient idea known throughout the world that a sacred tree acts like a sacred mountain as a link between heaven and earth. This tree of his dreams is that link to make things on earth jive with things in heaven. As Jesus himself taught us to pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>6</sup>

“The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth” (11). This is what we find in the depictions of world trees from around the world (Christmas trees comes from this idea):

“Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it,

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<sup>6</sup> I have written about this in an unpublished piece which I've linked to my website here: <https://www.dougvandorn.com/The%20World%20Tree%20and%20Stones%20of%20Fire%20from%20Michael%20vs.%20Dragon%20book.pdf>.

and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it” (12). The magnificence of the tree is beyond parallel. Its purpose is clearly to **nourish God’s creation**.

Next comes the terrifying part. “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven” (13). This is the only definitive chapter in the Bible where **the watchers** are mentioned, though there are probably echoes of them in several other passages.<sup>7</sup> What are they? Answering this is important to understanding his terror.

Here, the word is parallel to a “**holy one**” (**Deut 33:2; Job 5:1; Ps 89:5, 7; Zech 14:5; Jude 14**). Consider **Job 15:15**, “God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight.” A parallel passage is **Job 4:18**,

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<sup>7</sup> Proposals include **Micah 5:13; Jer 2:28**, and **Jer 19:15** (see **J.J. Collins**, “Watcher,” *DDD*, 894); **Jer 4:5-31** (**William Sailer** et al., *Religious and Theological Abstracts* [Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012]). The most interesting suggestion is **Isaiah 33:7-9**. The first line “**Their heroes (’er’el) cry**” (vs. 7) was thought in Jewish midrash to refer to “**death-spirits howling**” (**James D. Dunn; J.W. Rogerson**, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 520). From here, the LXX reads, “Behold the. . . angels of peace weep bitterly.” Finally, vs. 9 mentions Lebanon, Bashan, and Carmel, three places associated with Watchers in other literature (see **Gregorio del Olmo Lete**, “Bashan,” *DDD*, 161-163; **Wolfgang Röllig**, “Lebanon,” *DDD*, 506-507). Thus the reading, “**Behold the Arielites [angels] cry aloud, the angels of peace weep bitterly. Highways are desolate, Wayfarers have ceased, a covenant has been renounced, the Watchers rejected,**” has been defended by several scholars (cf. **Michael S. Heiser**, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” A Dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 227-28; **R. Murray**, “The Origin of Aramaic ‘Ir, Angel.” *Orientalia* 53 (1984), 307-308. If this is correct, then Isaiah may be remembering the same thing as Enoch. He would be referring to the time when the Watchers descended from heaven upon Mt. Hermon (surrounded by Lebanon, Carmel, and Bashan) and wept after being sentenced to binding in chains.

“Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error.” While God does call his own people “holy ones,” it is clear that they refer to angels here. Still another parallel is **Job 25:5**, “Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes.” A few chapters later these **stars** are parallel to the heavenly sons of God (**Job 38:7**). In other words, “watcher” is a term for the sons of God who rule and “watch” over the nations. God is called great Watcher of Israel (cf. **Gen 31:49; Ps 141:3; Dan 9:14; Jer 31:28; 44:27**). That then reminds us of the one like a son of the gods in ch. 3.

As early as 800 B.C. Hesiod referred to them as watchers.

You princes, mark well this punishment; for the deathless gods are near among men and mark all those who oppress their fellows with crooked judgements. . . For upon the bounteous earth Zeus has thrice ten thousand spirits, watchers of mortal men, and these keep watch on judgements and deeds of wrong as they roam, clothed in mist, all over the earth.

(**Hesiod**, *Works and Days* 248-53)

“Watcher” became a popular term for these heavenly beings during the intertestamental period when books like 1 Enoch were being put to parchment. In those places they are

also called “unsleeping ones,”<sup>8</sup> “Archangels”<sup>9</sup> (including Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, and Gabriel who oversaw the Garden of Eden, and the *serpents*, and the cherubim). Ezekiel seems to call them the “trees of Eden” (Ezek 31:9, 16, 18) in a chapter that very much parallels Daniel 4.

What might they have looked like? In a strange Dead Sea Scroll called the *Testament of Amram*, it says something most interesting about the appearance of the Watchers, “[I saw Watchers] in my vision, the dream-vision ... I raised my eyes and looked.] [One] of them was terr[i]fying in his appearance, [like a serpent, [his] cl[oa]k many-colored yet very dark ... [And I looked again], and . . . in his appearance, his visage like a viper...”<sup>10</sup> Another called the *Book of Noah* adds to the description saying that they have bodies “whiter than snow and redder than a rose,” that “every hair [is] white. . . curly and glorious” (1En 106:2). A final description found in a book that scholars have called the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* says, “And there appeared to me two men very tall, such as I have never seen on earth. And their faces shone like the sun, and their eyes were like burning lamps; and fire came forth from their lips. Their dress had the appearance of feathers; their feet were purple, their wings were brighter than gold,

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<sup>8</sup> 1 En 39:12-13; 40:2; 61:12; 71:7.

<sup>9</sup> 1 En 20:1.

<sup>10</sup> *Test Amram*, 4Q543 Frag Bi: 9-14. See Robert H. Eiseman and Michael Owen Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 164.

*their hands whiter than snow.*”<sup>11</sup> If this is anything like what he saw, no wonder Nebuchadnezzar was terrified. There are fallen Watchers and there are Watchers loyal to God. Which

The dream continues. “He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him” (Dan 4:14-16). Clearly, the tree represents a person. But who? Because whomever it is, this is not good news for him.

It concludes. “The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men” (17). There are some things we need to talk about here.

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<sup>11</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ in the Canonical Scriptures* (New York; Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains; Curts & Jennings, 1898), 491.

First, the **watchers are making decrees!** This is a corporate decision and one particular watcher has been given the task of informing king Nebuchadnezzar. This **corporate decision making refers to the divine council**, which scholars describe as a council of heavenly beings that meet in assembly in order to administer the affairs of the cosmos.<sup>12</sup> It is found all over the Bible, including later on in Daniel (particular ch. 7) as well as places like 1Kgs 22; Psalm 89; Isaiah 6; and many other passages.

I want to say something about this council that is directly related to our verse and to how I opened this sermon. Some Christians think that God freely gave up the continual use of his sovereign power so that he could give men **a freedom that can usurp his own sovereign will**. Let's say that he did that. Can he get it back whenever he wants to? If not, then how is he worthy of worship? If he can, then did he really give it up after all?

God does give creatures **a certain kind of freedom** to make choices and even to administer the affairs of heaven (watchers) and earth (men). But those choices and their

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<sup>12</sup> **M. S. Heiser**, "Divine Council," ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 112; **E. Theodore Mullen Jr.**, "Divine Assembly," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 213; **Brian P. Gault**, "Job's Hope: Redeemer or Retribution?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:690 (2016): 157.

freedom is **always under his sovereign control over all things**. They are under his decree. Otherwise, he's not God. Otherwise, he isn't in control. Otherwise, he isn't King. This is why this doctrine is so precious to Christians. Without it, there is no God in heaven.

But men make gods of themselves. Angels fall and turn themselves into objects of worship. And there isn't a thing that God can do about it? That is not biblical religion and it is the exact opposite thing we find Nebuchadnezzar learns in this very chapter. The point is, **God did allow the watchers to deliberate** here, but he still controls the council. As we immediately see and will see later, he always gets the final say. In fact, it will actually call it *his* decision. This verse tells us that the watchers gave this decree so that the living may know that *the Most High* rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men. Whether this particular watcher is a fallen angel or one loyal to the LORD, he still has to do what he is told. So what does all of this have to do with king Nebuchadnezzar?

### *Troubling Interpretation (4:18-19)*

He tells Belteshazzar that this is the dream that he had. Now, he wants to know the interpretation, because none of the other wise men could give it to him. But he knows that Daniel is able, because he has the spirit of the holy gods in him (**Dan 4:18**). But as Daniel heard the dream, **he became dismayed** and his distressed soul was in this state for a while, because **“his thoughts alarmed him”** (**19a**). The **king reassured him** not to let the dream or the interpretation alarm him (**19b**). My guess is that the king already had a pretty good idea that it was about himself. But Daniel, loyal subject of Nebuchadnezzar said, **“My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!”** (**19c**).

### *The Interpretation (4:20-26)*

When the interpretation finally came, **he did not hold back and lie** to Nebuchadnezzar. **The tree you saw**, which grew and became strong, whose top reached to heaven, which was visible to the end of the whole earth (**20**), which had beautiful leaves and abundant fruit where food was had for all the beasts and birds under heaven (**21**), **“It is you, O king, who have grown and become strong.”** We have

ancient depictions of gods as anthropomorphisms of the world tree. And since the king ruled for the god on earth, this is simply an extension of that idea.

Daniel explains what we've known for four chapters. "Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth" (22). Greatness, dominion, and heaven are important ideas, because the question at stake is, who has the real greatness and dominion? A man on earth or God in heaven?

The decree that watcher who came down from heaven gave to the king to "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" to be "wet with the dew of heaven" and have "his portion be with the beasts of the field, will seven periods of time pass over him" (23) means nothing else but that "a decree of the Most High" (notice that even though the watchers decreed it, so also did the Most High God) has been ordered against Nebuchadnezzar (24), the he shall be driven from men, his dwelling shall be with beasts, he shall be made to eat grass like an ox, he shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and this shall last for seven periods of time, until he finally knows that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom

he will (25). The stump that is left is so that once he recognizes this, his kingdom will be returned to the king (26).

There is another point to make here about this decree as it regards biblical infallibility. From all of the Babylonian tablets that have been discovered, we have **no evidence** that this ever happened to this king. What is strange is that there are **several similarities** between what is said here of him and something that happened to **Nabonidus**, the Babylonian king who ruled a few years after Nebuchadnezzar and saw the end of the empire when Cyrus the Great took them over.<sup>13</sup>

Nabonidus was known as the “**dreamer**” king who often sought out interpretations. He had an **affliction** which caused him to move out of Babylon to a tiny palace in the desert, far away from humans, to the place where wild beasts reside, and men eat grass like animals in popular thinking. This lasted for **10 years** while Belshazzar (not Belteshazzar-Daniel) ruled in his place. The absence of any known records of these things happening to Nebuchadnezzar and the presence of so many interesting parallels happening with a

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<sup>13</sup> The main studies of this have been from liberal scholars. See for example **A. M. Davis Bledsoe**, “The Identity of the <<Mad King>> of Daniel 4 in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources,” CR ST (Cristianesimo Nella Storia) 33 (2012): 743-58.  
[https://www.academia.edu/1479653/The\\_Identity\\_of\\_the\\_Mad\\_King\\_of\\_Daniel\\_4\\_in\\_the\\_Light\\_of\\_Ancient\\_Near\\_Eastern\\_Sources](https://www.academia.edu/1479653/The_Identity_of_the_Mad_King_of_Daniel_4_in_the_Light_of_Ancient_Near_Eastern_Sources).

later king tempts some to think that Daniel is confusing history (especially if they take a very late date for the book).

But the thing I've never understood about such skepticism is that it always **presupposes that the Bible is wrong**. That's the point of some scholarship—to bring doubt upon the holy word. But why do we have to come to skeptical conclusions? **Could it not have been** that these things actually happened to Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king of the Neo-Babylonian empire, and that after he died all traces of his heresy were eradicated from the record because Babylon was embarrassed by it? Furthermore, it is perfectly reasonable that either something similar happened to Nabonidus or that perhaps he was creating a persona for himself that invoked in the people's mind Nebuchadnezzar the Great as he tried his own reforms—to bring back the worship of the moon god. In other words, there are all kinds of ways you can go about interpreting data like this, and some are perfectly faithful to the Scripture without ignoring the things we have.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> **Going Deeper.** It is interesting that we found the so-called **Prayer of Nabonidus** at Qumran (4QPrNab) which **parallels even more closely the Nebuchadnezzar story** than the Babylonian tablets do, and they never questioned Daniel. Why can't both be true? **“As various scholars have noted, certain key parallelisms between the Qumran prayer and Nebuchadnezzar's prayer in Dan 4:30 can be observed: namely, the title of God, ‘Most High’; seven years of illness; prayer to God for his salvation; and reference to gold, [bronze, iron], wood, stone, and clay as materials for forming a divine image. These parallelisms seemingly confirm the literary dependency of**

## *Exhortation Center (4:27)*

The center of the chapter comes in **vs. 27** and as such, it is perhaps the most important thing to see. Daniel tells the king, “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.” Bold Daniel is speaking as a prophet of God to the most

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**Dan 4 on the prayer of Nabonidus from Qumran.**” (Oshima, 651-52, see n. below for bib.). Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 117. On actual texts at Qumran see especially T. M. Oshima, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Madness (Daniel 4:30): Reminiscence of a Historical Event or a Legend?” in *Now It Happened in Those Days: Studies in Biblical, Assyrian, and Other Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Mordechai Cogan on His 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* Vol. 2, ed. Amitai Baruchi-Unna et al (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 645-75.

Furthermore, Furthermore, Eusebius, the first great church history, recalls an ancient text that we no longer have in our own possession called the book of Abydenus, “Concerning the Assyrians,” which tells a tale of Nebuchadnezzar similar in some ways to that of Daniel, but after the fact. It is always important to remember that the absence of proof is not proof of absence (i.e. that it never happened). It is perfectly rational to take God at his word. The text reads, “Now Megasthenes [circa 300 B. C.] says that Nebuchadnezzar became stronger than Heracles.... After this, it is said by the Chaldeans, he ascended the roof of his palace and, possessed by some god or other, cried aloud: “O Babylonians, I Nebuchadnezzar foretell to you the coming misfortune, which neither Bel my ancestor nor Queen Beltis is able to persuade the Fates to avert. A Persian mule will come, having your own deities as his allies, and he will bring slavery. His cohort will be (the son) of a Median woman, the boast of Assyria. Would that, before my citizens were betrayed, some Charybdis or sea might receive and utterly extinguish him; or else, turning in other directions, that he might be driven across the desert, where there are neither cities nor track of man, but where wild beasts have their pasture and birds do roam, and that among rocks and ravines he might wander alone; and that I, before he imagined such things, might find a happier end.’ Having uttered this prophecy, he immediately disappeared.” (Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.41.6; trans. Satran, “Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation” 36; in John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 218.)

powerful man in the world. And he tells him to **turn from his sins in repentance** and do what is right in God's eyes by no longer oppressing and ruling the people harshly.

Calvin says, “If inquiry is made concerning the nature of repentance, it is the conversion of man towards God, from whom he had been alienated. Is this conversion then only in the hands, and feet, and tongue? Does it not rather begin in the mind and the heart, and then pass on to outward works? [This is so important because we've seen the king confess with his tongue, but he was not truly converted.] Hence true penitence has its source in the mind of men, so that he who wished to be wise must set aside his own prudence, and **put away his foolish confidence in his own reason**. Then he must **subdue his own depraved affections and submit them to God**, and thus his outward life will follow the inward spirit.”<sup>15</sup> This is what Daniel is calling the king to do.

### *The Fulfillment (4:28-36)*

In the story, it is the very next breath that sees the **fulfillment** of the dream. “**All this came upon King**

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<sup>15</sup> **John Calvin** and Thomas Myers, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 279.

Nebuchadnezzar” (Dan 4:28). Yet, in real life it took a year. “And the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?’” (29).

Just here, it is important to remember that I said “palace” can be translated as “temple” or the sanctuary part of a palace. Recall a prophecy made by Isaiah many years before Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. It, too, is a prophecy of the king of Babylon. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit” (Isa 14:12-15).

The KJV famously translates “Day Star, son of Dawn” as “Lucifer, son of the morning.” And in this way, it rightly sees a heavenly being behind the human king here. In fact, this heavenly being is none other than the figure in the Garden of Eden (the Nachash, the “Shining One”).

However, you must not forget that this prophecy is about the king of Babylon. The double-meaning shows you how heavenly beings stand behind earthly kings. This is not an either/or but a both/and.

Let's return. Nebuchadnezzar is standing on the roof of his temple. Now it is important to note that depictions of his famous hanging gardens are that of a [cosmic mountain](#), very similar in symbolism to that of the world tree—a link between heaven and earth.

Eden was both a garden and a cosmic mountain, as we know from a parallel prophecy to the king of Tyre in Ezekiel. “[You were in Eden, the garden of God ... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on](#)

you” (Ezek 28:13-17).<sup>16</sup> Again, we have a heavenly being at the Garden, but the prophecy is against both that creature and the human king of Tyre.

How this matters is that we have in our story an echo of the fall of Adam in the Garden. The king who rules and has dominion over the whole earth is in the garden. But his pride is such that it parallels the pride of Satan himself. For his crimes against the Most High, he is cast away from the Garden to an “anti-garden”<sup>17</sup> or desert, a wilderness, just like Adam and Eve. This is his “fall,” and the symbolism is obvious.

This is what in fact happens. “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” (Dan 4:33). I’ll point out two things about this verse.

First, people often wonder what was Nebuchadnezzar’s condition? Several suggestions have been proposed.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the Cosmic Mountain and Garden idea see my sermon “The Garden of God: Archetype of the Hope of Mankind: Gen 2:8-14,” (11-10-2013), <https://www.rbcnc.com/Genesis%202.8-14%20Garden%20of%20God.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Sulzbach, 130.

<sup>18</sup> One is a case of *mistaken identity*. This is the view of liberals who see Nabonidus’ absence in away from Babylon in Teima as the source. Besides what we’ve already said about this, Nabonidus did not leave for Teima because of illness, but as a conqueror who was also fleeing

one that makes literal sense is that God gave him a condition like *lycanthropy*.<sup>19</sup> Another word for a Lycaon is a *werewolf*. It comes from the Greek story of Lycaon, the wicked king of Arcadia, who tested Zeus by serving him a dish of a slaughtered and dismembered child in order to see whether Zeus was truly omniscient. In his quest to test Zeus' immortality, Lycaon attempted to murder the god while he slept. In return for these gruesome deeds, Zeus transformed Lycaon into the form of a wolf, and killed Lycaon's fifty sons by lightning bolts. The idea is not that Nebuchadnezzar became a werewolf, but that God cursed him with a mental disorder where the patient believes the he is a wolf.<sup>20</sup>

Second, what does it mean by associating *the dew of heaven* with becoming like a wild animal? Throughout the

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the moon gods wrath (*Oshima*, 650-60). A second view is related to this, which is that it is simply a *literary motif*; he was never really sick but is being compared to someone like Enkidu, the half-man half-animal creature from the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* (*Oshima*, 660-67). Enkidu's "whole body was shaggy with hair," and "With gazelles he eats ... With wild beasts he satisfies his need for water." Of course, they believe this story is also rooted in pure fiction. For similar translations and the parallels along with an interesting, albeit liberal take on Daniel and Qumran see *Joseph L. Angel*, "The Humbling of the Arrogant and the 'Wild Man' and 'Tree Stump' Traditions in the *Book of Giants* and Daniel 4," in *Ancient Tales of Giants from Qumran and Turfan: Contexts, Traditions, and Influences*, ed. Matthew Goff, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, and Enrico Morano (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016): 61-80.

[https://www.academia.edu/43965061/The\\_Humbling\\_of\\_the\\_Arrogant\\_and\\_the\\_Wild\\_Man\\_and\\_Tree\\_Stump\\_Traditions\\_in\\_the\\_Book\\_of\\_Giants\\_and\\_Daniel\\_4](https://www.academia.edu/43965061/The_Humbling_of_the_Arrogant_and_the_Wild_Man_and_Tree_Stump_Traditions_in_the_Book_of_Giants_and_Daniel_4).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 650.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps he was also cursed with *hypertrichosis*, also called werewolf syndrome, where a person grows hair anywhere on their body. The text doesn't say this happened, only that his hair grew as long as eagle's feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. Such descriptions further demonstrate his insanity, but may also point to further health problems.

Bible, dew is viewed as a blessing (Gen 27:28; Dt 32:2; Jdg 6:38; SS 5:2; etc.).<sup>21</sup> To be away from the dew of heaven is a curse (Gen 27:39; 1Kg 17:1; Hag 1:10; etc.). Peter Leithart explains the significance for our story. “This symbolism adds an additional dimension to the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar. Throughout Daniel 4-5, it is emphasized that the beastly king was ‘drenched with the dew of heaven’ (Dan. 4:15, 23, 25, 33, 5:21). Nebuchadnezzar thus represents all rebellious men, who defy God like wild beasts, all the while literally drenched with blessings from heaven. As with Nebuchadnezzar, God continues to send down dew upon the just and unjust, so as to drive them to repentance and thanksgiving.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the True God (4:34-37)*

One verse is all we need to know about the horror the king went through. But we need four to see how he responded to it. The days of his chopping down came to an end and “I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me” (34a). God healed him of his

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<sup>21</sup> Beth Uval, “The Dew of Heaven” (Gen. 27:28), *Jewish Bible Quarterly* (1998): 117-18. [https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/26/JBQ\\_26.2.pdf#page=49](https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/26/JBQ_26.2.pdf#page=49).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Leithart, “The Dew of heaven,” *Biblical Horizons Newsletter* No. 4 (May, 1989), <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-4-the-dew-of-heaven/>.

condition, because he was with this king the whole time (again, the dew of heaven), and had a purpose in all of this. Nebuchadnezzar came to understand that purpose.

What was it? That he might **finally come to worship God**. “**I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever**” (34b). Finally, this prideful king stopped worshiping himself and his gods.<sup>23</sup> We can tie Nebuchadnezzar’s deformation from looking like a human to an animal with the **golden statue** he made (tying it in also with the bronze and iron shackles he was bound with in the dream), that as a man made in the image of God, he ceases to be **an object of worship** (of himself through his pride) and becomes instead a **worshiper** of the True God. The last remaining object of worship that he has, himself, is like his idol in the previous chapter, totally destroyed.<sup>24</sup>

And why did he start to worship God? He makes what might be the greatest non-Jewish confession of God in the OT, “**For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his**

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<sup>23</sup> Besides what I say here, a good explanation of why Nebuchadnezzar was truly converted is **Mark Hassler**, “Daniel 4 and the Testimony of Nebuchadnezzar,” *Bible and Spade* 30.3 (2017): 60-65.

[https://www.academia.edu/34784567/Daniel\\_4\\_and\\_the\\_Testimony\\_of\\_Nebuchadnezzar](https://www.academia.edu/34784567/Daniel_4_and_the_Testimony_of_Nebuchadnezzar).

<sup>24</sup> This is in the abstract in **Fr. Silviu Bunta**, “The Mesu-Tree and The Animal Inside: Theomorphism and Theriomorphism in Daniel 4,” *Scrinium* III (2007): 364-384. [https://www.academia.edu/21479538/THE\\_MES\\_U\\_TREE\\_AND\\_THE\\_ANIMAL\\_INSIDE\\_THEOMORPHISM\\_AND\\_THERIOMORPHISM\\_IN\\_DANIEL\\_4](https://www.academia.edu/21479538/THE_MES_U_TREE_AND_THE_ANIMAL_INSIDE_THEOMORPHISM_AND_THERIOMORPHISM_IN_DANIEL_4).

kingdom endures from generation to generation; 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?’” (Dan 4:34b-35). This is where we began this morning—with God’s sovereignty, with predestination, with his control over all things both great and small.

Here we have dominion. **Dominion** is the language of a king. The high king of earth now recognizes who the True High King is, the lord of both heaven and earth. This God’s power and dominion is so overwhelming, that he makes **the most powerful man on the planet look as if he is nothing**. In fact, he turns him into nothing. It was nothing for God to break this man, he simply waited to do it in his own time. Notice, the king **does not ascribe any of this now to the watchers**, to the sons of God, those who came to him in his dreams, those he has worshiped since he was an infant in the womb of Babylon. He ascribes these things only to the Most High God of Daniel and the three men.

It is important as we conclude that you **come to grips with this amazing doctrine of God’s sovereignty**, as this great king did. So many people kick against the goads and refuse, *as*

Christians, and take this very doctrine to imply evil in God as they say it blames God for evil and they say, “What have you done.” But who is man to talk back to God? He is the potter; we are the clay. He does whatever he pleases.

It is also important that you see the purpose of this doctrine, biblically speaking. It is taught so that you might praise God and worship him. This is the reason you were created. Michael Horton talks about this verse in a section he begins with predestination which is titled: “Drama to Doctrine to Doxology.” He says, “That nothing comes to pass (including the sinful actions of human beings) apart from God’s sovereign governance is attested in many passages, including Genesis 50:20; Daniel 4:34–37; Acts 2:23; and Ephesians 1:11. In fact, an implication of God’s omniscience is that the future is determined. God knows the future exhaustively because he has decreed the future exhaustively.”<sup>25</sup> But then adds that these are “scenic vistas” where we “pause to adore.”<sup>26</sup> You have to see here that this doctrine is discussed by Nebuchadnezzar in the context of praise and worship. It is given to humble a human heart, to draw

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 309.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

them out of their own self-importance, and into the glories to be had when one trusts and rests in the King of kings.

And look at what this recognition, humility, and worship got Nebuchadnezzar. “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” (Dan 4:36). Nebuchadnezzar did not humble himself to get God to do this, for he learned that is impossible. But God did this because he had promised to in keeping the stump and through Daniel’s exhortation to stop sinning and turn to righteousness, which the king did.

In all of this, I am reminded of two more things. First, it is curious how often idols are described with tree and stone language. “Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise!” (Hab 2:19). “You who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth’” (Jer 2:27). “What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: ‘We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone’” (Ezek 20:32). “You shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known” (Deut 28:64).

Second, we have already seen how **Christ is the Stone** that crushes all the kingdoms of men. Now I want to show you how **Christ is the True Tree** that brings heaven and earth together. The prophets call him the “righteous branch” (**Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5, 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12**). In **Hosea 14:8** God says, “I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me” (NIV).” Wisdom (which is personified in Christ” is “a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (**Prov 3:18**). Jesus refers to himself as “the vine” (**John 15:5**). Also, in as much as Christ is true Israel, he is the fig tree (**Luke 21:29**) and the olive tree (**Rom 11:17**). Finally, Messiah was predicted to come from **the stump of Jesse** (**Isa 11:1**).

There is more symbolism in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that most could ever imagine. For this man who was cast out of his garden like Adam, is returned to it through recognition that he is not the Tree at all, but that God grants the right to eat from the tree of life by coming to Christ, the person he had seen walking around the fire in the previous chapter.

I pray that you have trusted in Christ. And if not, why not? You have heard the word today. “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation” (**Ps 146:3**). Put not your trust in yourself or any other created

thing. But **look to Jesus**, the author and finisher of faith. Turn from your sins and do righteousness. And with Nebuchadnezzar, pray out loud the words he began his story with and that he ends it with as he closes the ring. “**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**” (**Dan 4:37**).

## **Appendix:**

Besides the allusions to the Garden of Eden, a good case can be made that Daniel is referring to the Tower of Babel story, which we have seen indirectly today in the coming of the watchers, who number 70 according to the number of nations in Genesis 10.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> From a table in **James Bejon**, “Commentary on Daniel :: Chapter 4,” “18-19 (see below). [https://www.academia.edu/9206762/Commentary\\_On\\_Daniel\\_Chapter\\_4\\_4\\_1\\_37\\_](https://www.academia.edu/9206762/Commentary_On_Daniel_Chapter_4_4_1_37_).

| Gen. 10-11  | Dan. 1-4   |
|---|--|
| The men of Babel gather many nations together in the land of Shinar (outside Babel).  | Nebuchadnezzar gathers men from every nation together under the shadow of Babylon's empire (3.2-4, 4.12).  |
| The men of the Near East are able to speak to one another via a common tongue.  | Nebuchadnezzar is able to address men from every tribe, nation, and tongue via a common tongue (3.4, 4.1).   |
| The men of Babel erect an exceptionally tall structure on a "plain".  | Nebuchadnezzar erects an exceptionally tall structure on a plain (3.1-2).  |
| The men of Babel's main ambition is to complete an enormous building project and hence to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11.4).   | Nebuchadnezzar wants to make a name for himself; he wants his kingdom to stand throughout the ages and to display 'the glory of his honour' (4.30).  |
| The top of the tower of Babel enter into "the heavens" and hence arouses God's attention.   | The top of Nebuchadnezzar's tree-cum-kingdom 'reaches to the heavens' and hence triggers God's judgment (4.11).  |
| God gathers together his angels (Gen. 11.7's imperatives are addressed to a plurality of hearers) and descends from the heavens in order to pronounce judgment on the men of Babel (Gen. 11.7). | A watcher gathers together a council of heavenly creatures (4.14-15's imperatives are addressed to a plurality of hearers) and descends from the heavens in order to pronounce judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. |
| The nations are rendered unable to communicate with one another as a result of God's judgment.  | Nebuchadnezzar is rendered unable to communicate with his fellow men as a result of God's judgment.  |
| The nations are scattered in the aftermath of God's judgment of the Tower.  | The beasts of the field (which depict the nations) flee from the tree in the aftermath of God's judgment of it as its fruit is scattered far and wide.   |

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