
DANIEL 4: 1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all the peoples, nations, and languages, who dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

Nebuchadnezzar, after having subdued all the neighboring countries, and greatly enriched and adorned his own, became so intoxicated with his prosperity, as to draw down upon himself a very remarkable judgment, of which this chapter gives a particular account, in the very words of the edict or proclamation which the Babylonish monarch issued on his restoration to the throne. This state document begins with Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledging the hand of God in his late malady, Dan 4:1-3. It then gives an account of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, which portended the loss of his kingdom and reason for seven years, on account of his pride and arrogance, Dan 4:4-18. So it was explained by Daniel, Dan 4:19-27, and so it was verified by the event, Dan 4:28-33. It then recites how, at the end of the period fixed by the God of heaven for the duration of his malady, the Chaldean monarch became sensible of his dependence on the Supreme Being, and lifted up his eyes to heaven in devout acknowledgment of the sovereign majesty of the King of kings, the Ruler of the earth, whose dominion alone is universal, unchangeable, and everlasting, Dan 4:34-37.

Verse 1

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people - This is a regular decree, and is one of the most ancient on record; and no doubt was copied from the state papers of Babylon. Daniel has preserved it in the original language.

DANIEL 4: 2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked toward me.

Verse 2

I thought it good to show - A part of the decree was a recital of the wonders wrought by the hand of the true God in his kingdom and on his person.

DANIEL 4: 3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

Verse 3

How great are his signs! - There are no preternatural signs like his! His wonders - miraculous interferences, are mighty - they surpass all human power. He is the Sovereign of all kings, and his dominion is everlasting; and every generation is a proof of his all-governing influence. These are very fine sentiments, and show how deeply his mind was impressed with the majesty of God.

DANIEL 4: 4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.

Verse 4

I - was at rest - I had returned to my palace in Babylon after having subdued Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, Egypt, and Arabia. It was probably these great conquests that puffed him up with pride, and brought that chastisement upon him which he afterwards describes. See the dream of the emblematical tree explained.

DANIEL 4: 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid; and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

Verse 5

I saw a dream - See this dream circumstantially explained in the following verses.

DANIEL 4: 6 Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

DANIEL 4: 7 Then came in the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers; and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known to me its interpretation.

DANIEL 4: 8 But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and I told the dream before him, saying,

DANIEL 4: 9 Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no secret troubles you, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.

DANIEL 4: 10 Thus were the visions of my head on my bed: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth; and its height was great.

Verse 10

I saw - a tree - This vision Nebuchadnezzar says made him afraid. What a mercy it is that God has hidden futurity from us! Were he to show every man the lot that is before him, the misery of the human race would be complete.

Great men and princes are often represented, in the language of the prophets, under the similitude of trees; see Eze 17:5, Eze 17:6; Eze 31:3, etc.; Jer 22:15; Psa 1:3; Psa 37:35.

DANIEL 4: 11 The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached to the sky, and its sight to the end of all the earth.

DANIEL 4: 12 The leaves of it were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all: the animals of the field had shadow under it, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

DANIEL 4: 13 I saw in the visions of my head on my bed, and behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from the sky.

Verse 13

A watcher and a holy one - These are both angels; but, according to the Chaldean oracles, of different orders. They appear, according to their opinions, to be a kind of judges of human actions who had the power of determining the lot of men; see Dan 4:17.

DANIEL 4: 14 He cried aloud, and said thus, Cut down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit: let the animals get away from under it, and the fowls from its branches.

Verse 14

Hew down the tree - As the tree was to be cut down, the beasts are commanded to flee away from under his branches. His courtiers, officers, etc., all abandoned him as soon as his insanity appeared; but he soon fled from the society of men.

DANIEL 4: 15 Nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth:

Verse 15

Leave the stump - Let him not be destroyed, nor his kingdom alienated.

DANIEL 4: 16 let his heart be changed from man's, and let an animal's heart be given to him; and let seven times pass over him.

Verse 16

Let his heart be changed - Let him conceive himself to be a beast, and act as such, herding among the beasts of the field.

Let seven times pass over him - Let him continue in this state for seven years. I knew a man who was thus changed in his heart - in his imagination. He believed himself to be a bear, and would imitate the ursal growl, etc.; and the case did not appear to be hypochondriacal. Whether he ever came to sound mind, I know not.

DANIEL 4: 17 The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will, and sets up over it the lowest of men.

Verse 17

This matter is by the decree of the watchers - See on Dan 4:13 (note).

The Most High ruleth - He never leaves the government of the world to man, to second causes, or to fortuitous occurrences. What are thus called are his agents; they are no moving causes.

And setteth up - the basest of men - "Tyrants and kings from Jove proceed

Those are permitted, these decreed."

The throne ennobles no man: to be properly filled, the man must be noble. Some of the greatest and some of the meanest of men have sat on the throne. Kings differ in education, seldom in intellect, from the common mass of men; the power and authority are from God. The king himself may be given either in mercy or in wrath. When James II ruled this kingdom, it might well be said, God hath set up over it the basest of men. His successor was one of the best. The former nearly ruined it both in a civil and religious point of view; the latter was the means of restoring it in both these respects.

DANIEL 4: 18 This dream I, king Nebuchadnezzar, have seen; and you, Belteshazzar, declare 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.

DANIEL 4: 19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was stricken mute for a while, and his thoughts troubled him. The king answered, Belteshazzar, don't let the dream, or the interpretation, trouble you. Belteshazzar answered, My lord, the dream be to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries.

Verse 19

Daniel - was astonished for one hour - He saw the design of the dream, and he felt the great delicacy of interpreting it. He was not puzzled by the difficulties of it. He felt for the king, and for the nation; and with what force and delicacy does he express the general portent; "The dream to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies!"

DANIEL 4: 20 The tree that you saw, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached to the sky, and its sight to all the earth;

Verse 20

The tree that thou sawest - The dream is so fully interpreted in the following verses that it needs no comment.

DANIEL 4: 21 whose leaves were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all; under which the animals of the field lived, and on whose branches the birds of the sky had their habitation:

DANIEL 4: 22 it is you, O king, that are grown and become strong; for your greatness is grown, and reaches to the sky, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

DANIEL 4: 23 Whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from the sky, and saying, Cut down the tree, and destroy it; nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals of the field, until seven times pass over him;

DANIEL 4: 24 this is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which has come on my lord the king:

DANIEL 4: 25 that you shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass as oxen, and shall be wet with the dew of the sky, and seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will.

DANIEL 4: 26 Whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree; your kingdom shall be sure to you, after that you shall have known that the heavens do rule.

Verse 26

Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee - No new king was set up; Evil-merodach his son was regent during his father's insanity.

DANIEL 4: 27 Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your tranquillity.

Verse 27

Break off thy sins by righteousness - Do justice. Thou hast been an oppressive man; show mercy to the poor, many of whom have been made such by thyself: witness the whole nation of the Jews. He was to cease from his sins - repent and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, in order that he might find mercy at the hand of God.

DANIEL 4: 28 All this came on the king Nebuchadnezzar.

DANIEL 4: 29 At the end of twelve months he was walking in the royal palace of Babylon.

DANIEL 4: 30 The king spoke and said, Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?

Verse 30

Is not this great Babylon - Here his heart was inflated with pride; he attributed every thing to himself, and acknowledged God in nothing. The walls, hanging gardens, temple of Bel, and the royal palace, all built by Nebuchadnezzar, made it the greatest city in the world.

DANIEL 4: 31 While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from the sky, saying, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you.

Verse 31

While the word was in the king's mouth - How awful to a victorious and proud king: "Thy kingdom is departed from thee!" All thy goods and gods are gone in a moment!

DANIEL 4: 32 You shall be driven from men; and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field. You shall be made to eat grass as oxen. Seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will."

Verse 32

They shall make thee, etc. - Thou shalt be made to eat grass as oxen. The madness that fell upon him induced him to forsake society, and to run to the woods and deserts, where he lived like a wild beast, his hairs growing long and thick, so as to be a substitute for clothing; and his nails strong and hooked, that he might the better climb trees and grub up the ground, in order to get roots and earth-nuts. It was the mercy of God that thus clothed and accoutred him. His case seems much like that of the maniac in the Gospel, whose dwelling was among the tombs and in the mountains, and who shunned the society of men.

DANIEL 4: 33 This was fulfilled the same hour on Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from men, and ate grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the sky, until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

DANIEL 4: 34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him who lives forever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation.

DANIEL 4: 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can stay his hand, or ask him, What are you doing?

DANIEL 4: 36 At the same time my understanding returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness returned to me; and my counsellors and my lords sought to me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent greatness was added to me.

Verse 36

My reason returned - Every thing was fulfilled that was exhibited by the dream and its interpretation. It is very likely that this unfortunate king had so concealed himself that the place of his retreat was not found out; and the providence of God had so watched over every thing, that, on his return to his palace, he found his counselors and his lords, who received him gladly, and cleaved to and served him as they had formerly done.

DANIEL 4: 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are truth, and his ways justice; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.

Verse 37

Now I - praise and extol - It is very probable that Nebuchadnezzar was a true convert; that he relapsed no more into idolatry, and died in the faith of the God of Israel. It is supposed that he lived seventeen years after his restoration. But the authorized Version, which is followed in the margin, states the date of this decree to be b.c. 563, the year preceding Nebuchadnezzar's death.