

Daniel 4 – Nebuchadnezzar Dreams About Himself

Aramaic¹ – Modified Translation of NAS95

Dan. 4:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: “May your peace abound!

Nebuchadnezzar²

605-563 B.C.

Dan. 4:2 “It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.³

Dan. 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.

Dan. 4:4 “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.

Dan. 4:5 “I saw a dream, and it made me fearful. Indeed, the fantasies on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

Dan. 4:6 “So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

Dan. 4:7 “Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

Dan. 4:8 “But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods, and I related the dream to him, saying,

Dan. 4:9 ‘O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

Dan. 4:10 These were the visions in my mind on my bed. I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great.

Dan. 4:11 ‘The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, so that it was visible to the end of the whole earth.⁴

Dan. 4:12 ‘Its foliage was beautiful, and its fruit abundant, so that in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, so that all living creatures fed themselves from it.

Dan. 4:13 ‘I was looking in the visions in my mind on my bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven.

¹ **Daniel 1:1-2:4** is written in **Hebrew**, along with **8:1-12:13**. The rest of Daniel, **2:5-7:28**, is written in **Aramaic**.

² **Babylonian Persian (Mede) Greek Syrian Greek Egyptian Greek Roman Middle East Messianic**

³ To whom is Nebuchadnezzar addressing as the Most High God. Is it Yahweh? Perhaps, but then what is the author’s purpose in putting these verses of 4:1-3 in this part of his narrative when the following story indicates that the king is not fully trusting the one, true God. It would be to continue the thoughts and words of Nebuchadnezzar at the end of chapter 3.

Or, as a henotheist who worships one god above other gods, is he addressing Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians, so that he is improperly attributing actions and characteristics to him that belong to only Yahweh? Therefore, the author includes these verses to demonstrate the radical change that is about to take place in the narrative.

Probably the first option makes more sense.

⁴ I think that this is another instance where the “whole earth” is the extent of the earth that was known to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, i.e., the Middle East.

Dan. 4:14 ‘He shouted out and spoke as follows:

“Chop down the tree and cut off its branches.
Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit.
Let the beasts flee from under it,
And the birds from its branches.

Dan. 4:15 “Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground,
But with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field.
And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven,
And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

Dan. 4:16 “Let his mind be changed from that of a man,
And let a beast’s mind be given to him.
And let seven periods of time pass over him.

Dan. 4:17 “This sentence is by the decree of the watchers
And the decision is a command of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know
That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind,
And bestows it on whom He wishes
And sets over it the lowliest of men.”⁵

Dan. 4:18 ‘This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation. However, you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.’

Dan. 4:19 “Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.’ Belteshazzar replied, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!

Dan. 4:20 ‘The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth

Dan. 4:21 and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged —

Dan. 4:22 it is you, O king. For you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.⁶

⁵ Cf. Exodus 9:16 regarding the same issue with Pharaoh, “But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.” Cf. Romans 9:16-18 – **9:16** Therefore then, it did not ultimately belong to the man [i.e., Moses] who was desiring, nor to the man [i.e., Moses] who was exerting himself [to decide who received mercy and compassion], but it ultimately belonged to God who was being merciful. **9:17** For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this reason I raised you up, so that I could demonstrate My power by means of you and so that My name could be proclaimed in all the earth <Exodus 9:16>.” **9:18** Therefore then, He has mercy on whom *He* desires, and He hardens whom *He* desires.

⁶ [Expositor’s Bible Commentary – The phrase “distant parts of the earth” in v.22 raises the question of the meaning of “earth,” a word whose scope always depends on its context. Here it seems to refer to the farthest reaches of the Semitic world as established by the earliest empires of Hammurabi’s Babylon and the eighth-century Assyrian rulers. Undoubtedly the regions of Media to the northeast and of Elam, Persia, and India were well known to the Near East as totally distinct cultures from those of Mesopotamia and points west. But in designating the extent of empire in the Mesopotamian orbit, the custom of defining the limits of civilization as extending only to the borders of Elam was at least as early as the Third Dynasty of Ur. Back in the Sumerian period, King Amar-Enzu referred to himself as *lugal*

Dan. 4:23 ‘In that the king saw a watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it. Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,”

Dan. 4:24 this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king—

Dan. 4:25 that you be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. In addition, seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.⁷

Dan. 4:26 ‘And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that Heaven rules.

Dan. 4:27 ‘Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you. Break away now from your sins by doing what is right, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’⁸

Dan. 4:28 “All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

Dan. 4:29 “Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.

Dan. 4:30 “The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’⁹

Dan. 4:31 “While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared, “Sovereignty has been removed from you,

Dan. 4:32 and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of

dubdalimmubak (“king of the Four Quarters” of the earth) in his dedicatory building inscriptions, even though his empire was far more circumscribed than Nebuchadnezzar’s.]

Thus, we have another good example of how the Aramaic and by extrapolation Hebrew and Greek words for “earth” may refer to only the part of the world of which the speakers are intimately aware and therefore not to the whole world as we know it in modern times.

The Septuagint is quite different, but probably the phrase ἐπὶ προσώπου πάσης τῆς γῆς, “on the face of all the earth,” refers to the same thing.

⁷ [EBC – The dream took place most likely in 583 B.C., so that Nebuchadnezzar’s mental illness occurred between 582-575 B.C., before the end of the siege of Tyre.]

Cf. Ezekiel 26:7 – For thus says Yahweh God, “Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army.”

⁸ As in the New Testament, Daniel connects the king’s acts of righteousness and mercy with God’s granting him mercy.

⁹ [EBC – In one of the inscriptions in which Nebuchadnezzar praises himself for rebuilding and refurbishing twenty temples, a vast system of fortifications, and large shipping docks, he says, “The fortifications of Esagila [the temple of Marduk] and Babylon I strengthened, and established the name of my reign forever.” There is also a prayer to Marduk, “O Marduk, lord of the gods, my divine creator, may my deeds find favor before thee ... Thou art indeed my deliverer and my help, O Marduk; by thy faithful word which does not change, may my weapons advance, be sharp and be stronger than the weapons of the foe!” In addition, at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s becoming king, he wrote a hymn to Marduk, “I am the prince who obeys you, the creation of your hand. You are my creator, and the sovereignty over the hosts of men you have entrusted to me. According to your mercy, O Lord, which you have extended over all of them, incline unto compassion your exalted power, and set the fear of your godhead in my heart. Grant that which may seem good to you.”]

However, it would be safe to say that Nebuchadnezzar’s deference to Marduk (and not to Yahweh, the one true Creator) comes from the pride that he is displaying here in v. 30.

mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.”

Dan. 4:33 “Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.

Dan. 4:34 “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever,

‘His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Dan. 4:35 “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth.
No one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, “What have You done?””¹⁰

Dan. 4:36 “At that time my reason returned to me. In addition, my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out. Thus, I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.

Dan. 4:37 “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

¹⁰ The question here is like that in other parts of the story of Nebuchadnezzar, is he expressing genuine belief in Yahweh, or is he being driven to say these things about Him because of the suffering that he endured? Cf. Romans 9:19-21, **9:19** You will say to me then, “Why does He still blame people for their evil, for who has ever resisted His will?” **9:20** O man, on the contrary, think about who you are, the one who is defending himself against God. The thing which is molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? **9:21** Does not the potter of the clay have the right to make from the same lump one vessel for honor and another vessel for dishonor?”