

Daniel 4:1–37

“Those Who Walk in Pride He Is Able to Put Down”

Nebuchadnezzar’s Testimony

Chapter 4 is unique in Scripture. It is written as Nebuchadnezzar’s own public testimony to the whole known world about what God did in his life.

“Nebuchadnezzar the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.

How great are His signs, And how mighty His wonders!

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

(Daniel 4:1–3 NKJV)

These are the words of a man who has been humbled and changed. He sounds like someone who has come to genuine faith. He then tells his story.

The Troubling Dream

Nebuchadnezzar explains:

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.

I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.” (Daniel 4:4–5 NKJV)

He was comfortable, prosperous, and secure. Then God disturbed his peace.

As before, he called in all the wise men of Babylon—magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers—and told them the dream. Once again, they could not interpret it (Daniel 4:6–7).

Finally Daniel came in, whom he calls Belteshazzar, “according to the name of my god,” and he says:

“In him is the Spirit of the Holy God.”

(Daniel 4:8 NKJV, his own pagan way of describing the Spirit’s work in Daniel’s life)

Nebuchadnezzar respected Daniel deeply. He knew there were no secrets too hard for him, because God was with him (Daniel 4:9).

The Dream: A Great Tree and a Heavenly Decree

Nebuchadnezzar then describes his dream:

“These were the visions of my head while on my bed:

I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great.

The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the

ends of all the earth.

Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all.

The beasts of the field found shade under it,

The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it.”

(Daniel 4:10–12 NKJV)

The tree represents a powerful, world-encompassing kingdom: shelter, provision, and influence for the whole earth.

Then the dream takes a dramatic turn:

“I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven.

He cried aloud and said thus:

‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, And the birds from its branches.

Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, Bound with a band of iron and bronze, In the tender grass of the field.

Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, And let him graze with the beasts On the grass of the earth.

Let his heart be changed from that of a man, Let him be given the heart of a beast, And let seven times pass over him.” (Daniel 4:13–16 NKJV)

Here we meet a “watcher, a holy one” from heaven—a spiritual being observing events on earth. Nebuchadnezzar sees that his life is being watched from heaven. So is ours. Heaven is not indifferent to how we live.

The decree continues:

“This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.” (Daniel 4:17 NKJV)

The purpose of this judgment is clear: **that the living may know** that the Most High rules in human affairs and raises up whom He chooses—even the “lowest of men.” God is sovereign over all political power, even when leaders are unworthy. His rule is deeper and higher than all earthly systems.

Nebuchadnezzar finishes describing the dream and turns to Daniel:

“This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation... for you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.”

(Daniel 4:18 NKJV)

Daniel's Shock and Honest Counsel

Daniel is stunned:

"Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him." (Daniel 4:19 NKJV)

He realizes how severe the dream is. The king sees his distress and tells him not to be afraid of speaking the truth.

Daniel answers respectfully:

"My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!" (Daniel 4:19 NKJV)

He would have preferred this judgment fall on the king's enemies, not on the king himself. But he must be faithful.

He explains:

"The tree that you saw... it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth."
(Daniel 4:20–22 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar is the tree. God has made him great.

Then comes the hard part:

"They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." (Daniel 4:25)

Nebuchadnezzar is going to lose his sanity. He will live outdoors like an animal. His mind will be darkened. This will last until he finally learns, from the heart, that God—not Nebuchadnezzar—rules over all.

The phrase "seven times" likely refers to a cycle of seasons—summer, fall, winter, spring—repeated over a period of time. Some take it as seven years. Others, noting seasonal cycles, suggest a period like a year and three quarters. However long it was, it was long enough to completely humble the most powerful man on earth.

The stump with bands of iron and bronze means his kingdom will be preserved for him. He will be restored once he learns that "heaven rules" (Daniel 4:26).

Then Daniel does something very important: he calls the king to repent.

“Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.” (Daniel 4:27 NKJV)

God’s warning is meant to lead to repentance, not despair. Daniel urges him to turn from sin, to do what is right, and to show mercy—especially to the poor. He hints that God may delay or soften the coming judgment if the king responds.

A Year of Patience—Then a Moment of Pride

For twelve months nothing dramatic happened. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have behaved himself, at least outwardly (Daniel 4:28–29).

Then, one day, as he walked in the palace and looked over magnificent Babylon—famous for its hanging gardens, its massive walls, and unmatched beauty—he said:

“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30 NKJV)

This is pride in full bloom: *My kingdom. My power. My majesty.*

While the words are still in his mouth, a voice from heaven interrupts:

“King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field... until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” (Daniel 4:31–32 NKJV)

Immediately, the judgment falls.

Humiliated Like an Animal

Nebuchadnezzar loses his sanity on the spot:

“He was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.” (Daniel 4:33 NKJV)

This is one of the most sobering scenes in Scripture. The most powerful ruler on earth becomes a wandering, half-wild figure—sleeping in the open, drenched with dew, hair matted and long, nails grown into claws. His outward condition pictures what pride does to the soul.

Yet even this severe judgment is not God’s rejection. It is God’s mercy through humiliation. God is breaking his pride to bring him to life.

Restoration and True Worship

At the end of the appointed time, something vital happens:

“And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me.” (Daniel 4:34 NKJV)

The moment he looks up instead of in, his sanity returns.

He immediately praises God:

“And I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:34–35 NKJV)

He recognizes that God’s rule is eternal and absolute. God answers to no one. No one can successfully challenge His purposes.

Nebuchadnezzar goes on:

“At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me.” (Daniel 4:36 NKJV)

God not only restores him, but adds “excellent majesty.” Having been humbled, he is entrusted with even more—but now with a different heart.

He closes his testimony this way:

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.”
(Daniel 4:37 NKJV)

This sounds very much like genuine conversion. He acknowledges God’s truth, God’s justice, and God’s right to humble anyone who walks in pride—including kings.

Practical Application and Challenge for Believers

1. God still opposes pride and gives grace to the humble.

Nebuchadnezzar’s story is a warning and a comfort. Pride is not a small flaw; it is a deep rebellion against God. God will not ignore it. Whether in rulers, churches, or individuals, He is able to “put down” those who walk in pride.

Challenge:

Where is pride hiding in your life—self-reliance, self-promotion, resentment when you are not recognized? Ask the Lord to show you, and willingly humble yourself before He has to.

2. **God gives warnings before He brings discipline.**

Nebuchadnezzar received a dream, an interpretation, and a clear call to repent. He ignored it for a year—until the moment of crisis.

Challenge:

Are there warnings God has been giving you—through Scripture, conscience, or wise believers—that you have been ignoring? Daniel’s counsel still speaks:

“Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor”
(Daniel 4:27 NKJV).

3. **Heaven is watching.**

The “watchers” in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream remind us that our lives are not lived in private. Our choices matter. We are seen, not just by people, but by heaven itself.

Challenge:

Live each day as if your decisions are being watched and weighed—not to earn salvation, but to honor the God who saved you through the blood of His Son.

4. **God’s sovereignty and human responsibility go together.**

Daniel 4 emphasizes that God rules the kingdoms of men and sets over them whom He will. At the same time, Nebuchadnezzar is held responsible for his pride and called to repentance.

As believers, we trust God’s wise rule over history, but we are also called to choose humility, righteousness, and mercy day by day.

Invitation to Non-Believers: A King Humbled, a Savior Exalted

Nebuchadnezzar was powerful, proud, and self-sufficient—until God brought him to the end of himself. Only then did he look up and truly honor the King of heaven.

In a deeper way, God has done something even greater for us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this broken world. Jesus willingly went to the cross and shed His blood for our sins, taking the judgment we deserve. On the third day, He rose from the dead, and His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

The same God who humbled Nebuchadnezzar now calls you—not to insanity and humiliation, but to repentance and life.

If you sense God dealing with your heart—if you see your pride, your sin, your need—do not harden your heart. Like Nebuchadnezzar, lift your eyes to heaven.

You can pray something like this:

*“Lord Jesus, I confess that I have sinned and lived my own way.
I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and shed Your blood for my forgiveness.
I believe that You rose from the dead and that You are God, Savior, and Lord.
I turn from my sin and pride, and I surrender my life to You.
Take me, forgive me, change me, and make me Yours forever. Amen.”*

If you sincerely trust Him, He hears you. He is able to forgive, restore, and give you a new heart.

Closing Prayer

Father in heaven we acknowledge that You are the King of heaven and Lord over all the earth. Your dominion is an everlasting dominion, and Your kingdom endures from generation to generation. No one can stay Your hand or say to You, “What are You doing?”

We thank You for warning us, correcting us, and loving us enough to confront our pride. We thank You most of all for Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross to save us and whose resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

*Teach us to walk humbly before You.
Help us to break off our sins by doing what is right, and our iniquities by showing mercy.
Make us faithful in a proud world, and use our lives to point others to You.*

For those who are far from You, draw them by Your Spirit. Open their eyes to see Jesus and surrender to Him.

*We commit ourselves to You, asking You to rule our hearts by Your Spirit and to use us for Your glory.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*