

Daniel 4:1-9

The Self-Delusions of a Self-Made Man

¹ *“King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.*

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

⁴ *I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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, ⁹ “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.”* – Daniel 4:1-9 ESV

The content of this chapter appears to cover events that happened much later in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, perhaps near its end. Some scholars propose that a significant gap exists between the close of chapter three and the opening of chapter four. If correct, Daniel would be a much older man and Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would have had time to reach the height of its glory. Babylon would have become a formidable world power with its opulent capital city reflecting Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams of unbridled success and significance.

The chapter opens with what appears to be a written testimony from the king himself. He begins by praising the greatness of *‘ēlā‘illay* – the God most high. This is clearly a reference to the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar was not declaring his allegiance to the Hebrew God but was simply acknowledging Yahweh’s supremacy over all other gods. The king had ample evidence to reach this conclusion, having witnessed the miraculous salvation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. He also experienced Yahweh’s power when Daniel interpreted his dream, something none of his magicians, sorcerers, or astrologers could do. Nebuchadnezzar was impressed with the God of the Hebrews and had promoted Him to a premier position among all the gods of the Babylonians.

Nebuchadnezzar was an equal opportunity idolater, choosing to include the gods of the nations he had conquered. Since Yahweh had proved Himself powerful and useful, Nebuchadnezzar

was willing to promote His worship. He had even issued an official decree that made it illegal to denigrate or disparage the God of the Hebrews.

“If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!” – Daniel 3:29 NLT

Even years later, as the king reflected on his power and prominence, he was willing to give Yahweh some of the credit. Verses 1-3 are intended to set up what Nebuchadnezzar is about to relate. In the verses that follow, the king recalls yet another incident involving a dream, Daniel, and Yahweh. Decades have passed and the prophecy contained in the first dream has not yet been fulfilled. His kingdom remains intact and his power has not diminished. He even begins his testimony with the pride-filled statement, “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living in my palace in comfort and prosperity” (Daniel 4:4 NLT).

He was enjoying all the perks and benefits that accompanied the crown. He was rich, revered, and greatly feared. He ruled over a kingdom that had conquered much of the known world. But Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t control his unconscious thoughts. As he lay on his richly appointed bed, his mind was filled with nightmares that left him agitated and confused. Unable to sleep and anxious to know the meaning of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar sent for his wise men, a distinguished group of trusted advisors that included “magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers” (Daniel 4:7 NLT). But as before, these self-proclaimed prophets men proved powerless to help the king.

“I told them the dream, but they could not tell me what it meant.” – Daniel 4:7 NLT

This time, Nebuchadnezzar took it easy on them. He didn’t require them to use their prognosticating powers to determine *what* he dreamed, he simply asked them to explain its meaning. But they were clueless.

Then Daniel showed up. The text doesn’t explain Daniel’s late arrival but according to chapter two, he was the highest-ranking wise man in the kingdom.

...the king appointed Daniel to a high position and gave him many valuable gifts. He made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, as well as chief over all his wise men. – Daniel 2:48 NLT

Perhaps Daniel had been occupied with matters of state. But whatever the case, his timing could not have been better. He arrived just in time to hear the king’s dream and provide its interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar recounts Daniel’s entrance into the royal court by using his Hebrew and Babylonian names. It is unclear what Belteshazzar means but the king states that it has ties to one of his gods. He also adds the note that Daniel was filled with “the spirit of the holy gods” (Daniel 4:8 ESV). It seems unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan polytheist, would

have been referring to the Holy Spirit. He was simply acknowledging that Daniel possessed supernatural powers of a divine origin.

Desperate to know what his dream meant, Nebuchadnezzar begged Daniel to use his powers to solve the mystery.

“Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too great for you to solve. Now tell me what my dream means.” – Daniel 4:9 NLT

While Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t mention Yahweh by name, he knows that Daniel is a devout follower of the God of the Hebrews. Throughout this chapter, Yahweh’s superiority will be proclaimed. Even in the opening verses, Nebuchadnezzar declares His greatness.

*“How great are his signs,
how powerful his wonders!
His kingdom will last forever,
his rule through all generations.” – Daniel 4:3 NLT*

But as the chapter unfolds, Yahweh’s supremacy will be repeatedly stated.

“...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” – Daniel 4:17 ESV

“...this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king.” – Daniel 4:24 ESV

“...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” – Daniel 4:25 ESV

“...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” – Daniel 4:32 ESV

“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...” – Daniel 4:34 ESV*

*“...he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth...” – Daniel 4:35 ESV*

“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 4:37 ESV

This entire chapter is intended to provide a stark contrast between the powers of this world and the sovereign majesty and might of God Almighty. Nebuchadnezzar is meant to represent human authority in all its prideful arrogance. He is the consummate self-made man who dares to shake his fist in the face of God and declare his autonomy and independent authority. Surrounded by all the trappings of his own success, he dares to see himself as a deity in his own mind. But his dream mocks and rocks his confidence.

Nebuchadnezzar had conquered the world, but he couldn't win the battle going on inside his head. Things were happening that he could not control or explain. There was a dimension to the world he could not see and over which he was powerless. Despite his posse of prophetic posers, he could not see the future. Regardless of his power, he had no way of controlling his fate. But the King of Heaven was not only aware of Nebuchadnezzar's future, but He was in control of it.

Nebuchadnezzar was going to learn a powerful and painful lesson about God's sovereignty and man's inadequacy. His might was minimal when compared to that of God. His rule was impermanent when compared to that of God. His autonomy was non-existent when compared with the providential power of God Most High.

*...all the nations of the world
are but a drop in the bucket.
They are nothing more
than dust on the scales.
He picks up the whole earth
as though it were a grain of sand. – Isaiah 40:17 NLT*

*God sits above the circle of the earth.
The people below seem like grasshoppers to him!
He spreads out the heavens like a curtain
and makes his tent from them.
He judges the great people of the world
and brings them all to nothing. – Isaiah 40:22-23 NLT*

*The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the Lord;
he guides it wherever he pleases. – Proverbs 21:1 NLT*

Nebuchadnezzar was surrounded by wealth, power, prestige, and a team of worldly wisemen who offered to provide him with insights into the future. But all the pomp and prophetic promises of this world are no match for God Most High.

Daniel 4:10-18

If A Tree Falls In the Forest...

¹⁰ *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. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² 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.*

¹³ *"I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.' ¹⁸ 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."*
– Daniel 4:10-18 ESV

On this occasion, Nebuchadnezzar shares the content of his dream with Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar experienced his first disturbing dream, Daniel was forced to reveal its content and meaning (Daniel 2). This dream, like the first, left the king disturbed, frightened, and anxious to know what the imagery symbolized. But in recounting the details of the dream to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar appears to have already reached his own conclusion about its meaning.

It didn't take a soothsayer or fortune-teller to inform Nebuchadnezzar that the dream was about him. He seems to have already surmised that the tree featured in his vision was somehow meant to represent him and his kingdom. It would have been difficult to miss the symbolism and its less-than-encouraging message. The dream starts out well, as a large, healthy tree suddenly appears in the middle of the earth. This fully grown tree then began to grow ever larger, "reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see" (Daniel 4:11 NLT). So far, so good.

At this point in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar must have viewed the lush, healthy tree as an apt symbol of his own ever-expanding kingdom. After all, the tree was fruitful and beneficial to all those around it.

“It had fresh green leaves, and it was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. All the world was fed from this tree.” – Daniel 4:14 NLT

Nebuchadnezzar would have enjoyed this part of the dream, viewing the imagery as justification and validation for his quest for global domination. He was doing the world a favor. The expansion of his kingdom had been a good thing, delivering peace and prosperity to the nations of the world. At least, that’s the way he would have seen it. But his dream doesn’t reflect the real outcome of his campaign to become the world’s reigning superpower: death, devastation, and destruction.

Nebuchadnezzar had long ago convinced himself that his conquests had been the right thing to do. After all, he had benefited greatly from his invasion of foreign lands and the subjugation of innocent people. His kingdom flourished and its melting pot of citizens lived in relative peace and harmony. The early portion of the dream seems to have confirmed the king’s sanitized view of his quest for global ascendancy.

Then the dream takes a dark turn with the appearance of a “watcher.” This Aramaic term refers to one who stays awake to keep watch. Every kingdom had men who served as watchmen on the walls and played an important role as an early warning defense system, protecting the nation from threats. But in his dream, Nebuchadnezzar recognized this watcher as “a holy one, coming down from heaven” (Daniel 4:13 NLT). This was some kind of divine being who delivered a very disturbing message, transforming the king’s dream into a nightmare.

*“Cut down the tree and lop off its branches!
Shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit!” – Daniel 4:14 NLT*

This would have been the point in the dream when the king’s heart rate increased and his blood pressure spiked. The message was not what he wanted or expected to hear. This was some kind of divine decree, ordering the tree’s immediate destruction. Nothing about this message could be viewed as encouraging or uplifting. No amount of spin could make it sound beneficial or positive. Nebuchadnezzar knew full well that this message did not bode well for him or his kingdom. What made his dream so frightening was its rather obvious meaning. Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t looking for Daniel to provide an interpretation as much as clarification. He knew something was coming but he had no way of knowing what to expect. That is what frightened him most.

As Nebuchadnezzar continued to relay the specifics of the dream, he noted that the watcher gave further instructions to an invisible and unidentifiable audience. These unseen agents of destruction were ordered to chase away all the birds and animals and then cut down the tree, leaving only a stump. The entire scene was to be transformed from one of peace and tranquility to one of chaos and destruction. Then the limbless, fruitless stump was to be “bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass” (Daniel 4:15 NLT).

That's when the watcher's message takes a sudden and disturbing twist. He shifts from talking about a defoliated tree and begins referring to an unidentified man.

*"Now **let him** be drenched with the dew of heaven,
and **let him** live with the wild animals among the plants of the field.
For seven periods of time,
let him have the mind of a wild animal
instead of the mind of a human." – Daniel 4:15-16 NLT*

Obviously, this caught the king's attention. He no longer had to doubt whether the tree represented him or his kingdom; it was now perfectly and painfully clear. But what did it mean? What was the watcher describing and how would it turn out?

The dream ends without a clear resolution. The watcher simply states that the dream is of a heavenly origin and has a divine purpose: "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" (Daniel 4:17 ESV). That part the king understood. But what did the rest of the dream mean? He must have assumed he was the man in the dream, but he had no idea what the watcher's words meant. That's where Daniel was to come in, so the king concluded his recounting of his dream with a desperate plea to his trusted counselor.

"Belteshazzar, that was the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now tell me what it means, for none of the wise men of my kingdom can do so. But you can tell me because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." – Daniel 4:18 NLT

The stage was set and the expectations were high. Once again, Daniel found himself in the unenviable position of having to deliver not-so-good news to the most powerful man in the world. But Daniel would step up to the challenge and provide the message God had for the prideful and fear-filled king.

Daniel 4:19-33

A Mind of His Own

¹⁹ 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! ²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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— ²² 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. ²³ 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,’ ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.”

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ 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?” ³¹ 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, ³² 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.” ³³ 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. – Daniel 4:19-33 ESV

In the earlier episode, when forced to reveal and interpret the king’s dream, Daniel took the matter to God. He gathered his three friends together and they prayed, asking God to tell them the content of the dream and its meaning, and God obliged. This time, however, there is no indication that Daniel utilized prayer to discern the interpretation of the king’s second dream. It appears Daniel knew the meaning of the dream as soon as the king described it, but he

hesitated and was “dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him” (Daniel 4:19 ESV). No explanation is given for Daniel’s disturbed state of mind but when the king sensed his reluctance to speak and encouraged him to reveal what he knew, Daniel replied, “I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!” (Daniel 4:19 NLT).

Daniel may have been well into his 50s by the time this incident occurred. He would have spent decades in Nebuchadnezzar’s employment, serving as the chief of all the king’s wise men. It’s likely that, during that time, Daniel and the king would have developed a close relationship. Despite their ethnic and religious differences, the two men would have shared a mutual respect and affinity for one another. Daniel’s hesitancy to reveal the dream’s meaning was born out of his care and concern for Nebuchadnezzar, not a fear of repercussions.

Buoyed by the king’s words of encouragement, Daniel broke his silence and said, “That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth” (Daniel 4:22 NLT). That part of the dream would have been easy to deliver because it was what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to hear. But it was the second half of the interpretation that disturbed Daniel and caused him to hesitate. The blissful, happy image of the king’s reign would not end well. The watcher in the dream was a bad omen that signaled an unpleasant and unavoidable end to the king’s fame and fortune.

“Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king. You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.” – Daniel 4:24-25 NLT

Daniel was the bearer of bad news, but he didn’t deliver his message with any sense of joy or vindictiveness. He found no comfort in informing Nebuchadnezzar of his fate. Daniel seems completely aware that Nebuchadnezzar was going to get what he deserved. After all his years in the king’s employment, Daniel knew from personal experience that Nebuchadnezzar had a pride problem. He would have regularly witnessed the king’s growing arrogance and overconfidence in his own self-worth. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world and he had built an empire that was second to none. But Daniel knew that God was about to send a powerful and irrefutable message to his pride-filled boss.

What’s interesting to note is the focus of God’s judgment. He chose to mess with Nebuchadnezzar’s mind, not his might. God could have dealt a death blow to the kingdom of Babylon but, instead, he threatened the king with temporary insanity. Babylon posed no problem for God; He was not intimidated by Babylonian supremacy or their reputation as an invincible superpower. As Daniel reveals in his interpretation of the dream, “...the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses” (Daniel 4:25 NLT).

God had chosen to use Babylon as His instrument of judgment against the nation of Judah. He had raised Nebuchadnezzar to power for the sole purpose of fulfilling His promise of divine discipline against His disobedient children. God had repeatedly warned His rebellious people of the consequences for their spiritual infidelity.

“Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.” – Jeremiah 25:8-9 ESV

God had fulfilled that warning, raising up Nebuchadnezzar to conquer and capture Judah. But Nebuchadnezzar had grown overconfident and self-assured. In his eyes, he was a self-made man who took full credit for his own success and saw no end to his dream of world domination. But God had other plans. Little did Nebuchadnezzar know that his 15 minutes of fame would soon be over. God had given Jeremiah a second part to the divine plan for Babylon’s future.

“Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.” – Jeremiah 25:10-14 NLT

But that prophecy was to be fulfilled later. Nebuchadnezzar faced a much more imminent problem – the loss of his mind, not his kingdom. What God had in store for him was going to be personal and painful. His kingdom would remain intact but his sanity would be removed for “seven periods of time” (Daniel 4:25 NLT). Most scholars believe this is a reference to years. If so, then the king was going to go through a protracted period of insanity. He would live like an animal with no recollection of his former status as king and no interaction with other humans. The once great and greatly feared king of Babylon would become a madman, and there was nothing he could do to prevent it from happening.

There is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar could forestall the inevitable. He had no power to prevent God Most High from fulfilling His edict. Daniel will plead with the king to change his ways, but even he seems unconfident that it will do any good.

“King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.” – Daniel 4:27 NLT

God knew Nebuchadnezzar's heart better than Daniel did. He knew the king would never bow the knee or renounce his pride and arrogance. Even the threat of losing his most precious possession, his mind, would not be enough to cause Nebuchadnezzar to repent.

But there was good news. While God would destroy Nebuchadnezzar's mind, it would only be for a season. In time, God would relent and restore the king's sanity. But it would only happen after the king had learned his lesson. God had Daniel inform Nebuchadnezzar of the meaning behind the stump in his dream.

"...the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules." – Daniel 4:26 NLT

Nebuchadnezzar's mind would be bound by God until he was willing to admit the reality of God's sovereignty. There was only one King and He alone rules and reigns over all the kingdoms of Earth. And despite Daniel's desperate pleas for Nebuchadnezzar to repent, the king continued in his stubborn, pride-filled ways.

Daniel 4:34-37

A Simple Lesson, Hard Learned

³⁴ *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;
³⁵ 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?"*

³⁶ *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. ³⁷ 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 4:34-37 ESV

No details are provided regarding Nebuchadnezzar's seven-year stint of psychological suffering. The text simply states that he "was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven" (Daniel 4:33 NLT). To put it bluntly, Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind, he went crazy. One minute, he stood on his palace rooftop surveying his vast domain and proclaiming his own glory, then, without warning, he was relegated to living like a wild animal.

He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles' feathers and his nails were like birds' claws. – Daniel 4:33 NLT

Seven years passed before Nebuchadnezzar "came to his senses" and recognized the error of his ways. For some unexplained reason, this beast of a man looked up to heaven and his reason returned. After seven years of living more like an animal than a man, he suddenly snapped out of it. But Nebuchadnezzar realized that his sudden mental restoration had not resulted from good fortune; it had been the work of God – the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He confessed, "My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever" (Daniel 4:34 NLT). His mind fully restored, the king articulated the insights about God he had gained from his experience.

*"His rule is everlasting,
and his kingdom is eternal.
All the people of the earth
are nothing compared to him.*

*He does as he pleases
among the angels of heaven
and among the people of the earth.
No one can stop him or say to him,
‘What do you mean by doing these things?’” – Daniel 4:34-35 NLT*

But what would cause the pagan king of one of the most powerful nations on earth to sing the praises of the God of Israel – the nation he had defeated and whose people he had taken captive? Why would this man praise, glorify, and honor Yahweh as the King of Heaven? The answer is simple. God had humbled him. Nebuchadnezzar had learned the power and prominence of God the hard way. Seven years earlier, God had given Nebuchadnezzar a dream in which He had predicted the king’s not-too-distant and far-from-pleasant future.

It took Daniel to interpret the dream, but the meaning was clear. Because of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride, God had to humble him. Nebuchadnezzar refused to acknowledge that God was responsible for putting him on his throne. He couldn’t bring himself to consider or acknowledge subordination to anyone else, including God. After having conquered virtually every nation in the region, he became drunk on his own success. He had a powerful army, lived in a beautiful palace, and enjoyed a life of ease and prosperity. He had power, possessions, and a massive pride problem.

Nebuchadnezzar overlooked one important factor: it was God who had given him his throne and the ability to conquer all the surrounding nations. God had raised up Babylon for his own divine purposes and Nebuchadnezzar was simply a tool in the hands of the Almighty. So God took this pride-filled pagan king and humbled him. Daniel advised the king to take the dream seriously.

“...stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.” – Daniel 4:27 NLT

But Nebuchadnezzar refused to listen. However, seven years later, Nebuchadnezzar was a new man. He went from worshiping himself to worshiping God. He went from praising himself to praising God. Through his tragedy, he came to understand God’s rule “is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal” (Daniel 4:34 NLT).

Pride is a powerful force in the hands of the enemy; he uses it to take our eyes off of God. Satan does not require men to worship him; he just wants to ensure that they worship ANYTHING other than God, and the worship of self is the ultimate form of idolatry. When we read our own press clippings and begin to believe our success is self-made, we are in danger. Self-exaltation is ultimately self-destructive. It can be bad for your health because God does not share His glory with anyone.

The Scriptures remind us, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 NIV). The lesson Nebuchadnezzar had to learn was that God is sovereign over everyone and

everything. He had to understand that God rules over ALL the kingdoms of Earth, including Babylon. He had to learn that God was the only true King and had no equals or competitors. He had to come to grips with the fact that God was the consummate conqueror, not him. Nebuchadnezzar had learned the lesson that James simply reiterated: “All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud” (Daniel 4:37 NLT).

The amazing part of the story is that Nebuchadnezzar’s admission of God’s greatness was accompanied by his own restoration to power and prominence. During the seven years Nebuchadnezzar suffered from insanity and lived in lonely isolation from the rest of humanity, God preserved his kingdom. No coup took place. Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t de-throned or written off as a lost cause. His kingdom remained intact and as soon as word got out that he had been healed, his advisors and counselors restored him to power and showered him with greater honor than ever. And Nebuchadnezzar recognized that it was all God’s handiwork..

The lessons in this story are profound and echo across the ages. Pride is at the root of all sin and continues to plague humanity at every level. Even as modern-day believers we can begin to believe that any success we enjoy has been self-made. We convince ourselves to believe we are the masters of our souls and the sole arbiters of our fates. Our accomplishments and achievements are the work of our hands. But in this passage, God reminds us that the only thing that separates us from the wild beasts in the field is His divine, sovereign hand. He can lift us up and He can bring us down. He will not tolerate self-worship or put up with self-exaltation. We are to keep our eyes focused on Him alone. May we learn from Nebuchadnezzar’s mistake and acknowledge God’s power and sovereignty, so we don’t have to learn it the hard way.

Every man and woman must one day face the reality that God alone reigns. There are no other gods, either large or small. There are no self-made men and women. God rules over all that He has made and determines the fates of men and the futures of kingdoms.

*The Lord has made everything for his own purposes,
even the wicked for a day of disaster. – Proverbs 16:4 NLT*

He also has a strong disdain for those who proudly declare their independence and autonomy.

*The Lord detests the proud;
they will surely be punished. – Proverbs 16:4-5 NLT – Proverbs 16:5 NLT*

God also reminds us that He not only despises pride, but He knows how to deal with it.

*Pride goes before destruction,
and haughtiness before a fall. – Proverbs 16:18 NLT*

And He offers a better option for all those who will recognize their need for Him and acknowledge that submission to His will always results in soul-satisfaction rather than self-satisfaction.

*Better to live humbly with the poor
than to share plunder with the proud.* – Proverbs 16:19 NLT