DANIEL 4

Learning the Hard Way

Daniel 4 — A Deep Dive

> *"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."*
> DANIEL 4:37

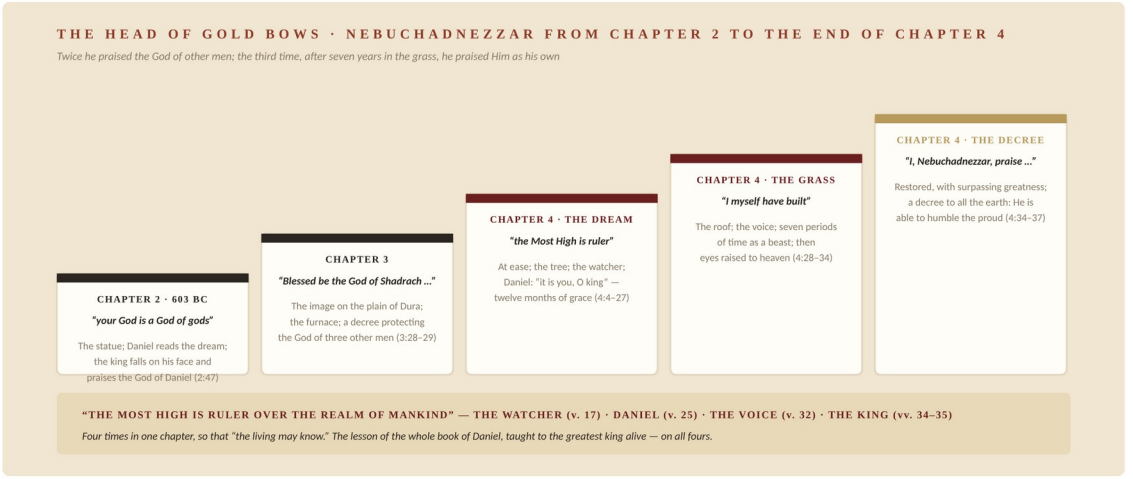
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · THREE VOICES: TSARFATI · MACARTHUR · GUZIK

Where the story stands

1. Daniel 4 is unique in the Bible: a chapter written by a pagan emperor, in his own voice, as a decree to “all the peoples, nations, and men of every language,” telling the world what the God of Israel did to him.

2. The king who dreamed of the statue (chapter 2) and built the golden image (chapter 3) here writes his own testimony, and he opens it with praise before he tells the humiliation that produced it.

3. The date is late in his reign; Babylon is finished, the wars are over, and the king is “at ease… and flourishing.”



At Ease in My Palace

DANIEL 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!

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati calls Daniel 4 the testimony of the head of gold. The man who stands at the top of the statue in chapter 2 opens his own decree by confessing that God's kingdom is the everlasting one, the very thing…

JOHN MACARTHUR

MacArthur notes the form: a royal proclamation, addressed to everyone, written in the first person. God did not merely humble Nebuchadnezzar; He made him publish it.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik underlines the simple goodness of telling what God has done: "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Psalm 107, verse 2). The devil would rather God's works went unspoken.

THE ORIGINAL **ATHAYYA VE-TIMHAYYA · "SIGNS AND WONDERS"**

The Tree and the Watcher

DANIEL 4:10

Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great.

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati reads the tree as the empire seen from the king's side: beautiful, abundant, sheltering, universal. Everything the statue of chapter 2 said in metal the tree says in leaves, and both are about to be cut.

JOHN MACARTHUR

MacArthur draws out the appeal of the image: the king dreams of himself as the one on whom everything depends. That is the heart of pride, not cruelty but indispensability, the conviction that the world is fed from my branches.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik cites Wood: both the Assyrian and the Babylonian kings thought of themselves as rulers over all the earth, and the tree is that self-image drawn by God. He notes that nothing in verses 10–12 is a…

THE ORIGINAL **ILAN · "TREE"**

The Tree and the Watcher

THE TREE · THE DREAM (4:10–17) AND ITS MEANING (4:20–26)

A great tree was the ancient picture of a mighty king (Ezekiel 31). Everything the statue said in metal, the tree says in leaves — and both are cut.

THE DREAM

height reached to the sky
visible to the end of the whole earth (v. 11)

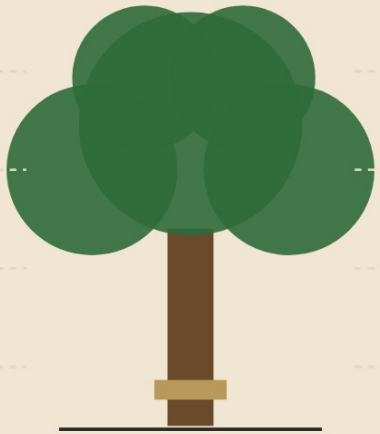
foliage beautiful, fruit abundant
"in it was food for all" (v. 12)

beasts in its shade, birds in its branches
all living creatures fed from it (v. 12)

"Chop down the tree"
the watcher's decree from heaven (v. 14)

"leave the stump with its roots"
a band of iron and bronze (v. 15)

"seven periods of time"
a beast's mind given to him (v. 16)



the stump, banded with iron and bronze

THE MEANING

"it is you, O king"
your majesty has reached to the sky (v. 22)

your dominion to the end of the earth
the provider and protector of the nations (v. 22)

the nations Babylon fed and ruled
the beasts and birds are the peoples (v. 21)

sovereignty removed
driven away from mankind (vv. 25, 31)

"your kingdom will be assured to you"
after you recognize that Heaven rules (v. 26)

seven years in the grass
"until you recognize that the Most High is ruler" (v. 25)

"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" — v. 17

It Is You, O King

DANIEL 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!

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati draws attention to Daniel's heart. The man who was carried off from Jerusalem by this king, who has watched him burn and boast and build, is grieved to tell him the truth.

JOHN MACARTHUR

MacArthur calls verses 19–22 a model for every preacher. Compassion first, Daniel is appalled, and wishes it on the king's enemies instead.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik connects "it is you, O king" to "You are the man!" and notes that Daniel, unlike Nathan, is a foreign captive speaking to an absolute monarch with a furnace in recent memory.

THE ORIGINAL **ESHTOMAM · "WAS APPALLED"**

It Is You, O King

THE SHAPE OF A FAITHFUL WARNING · DANIEL BEFORE THE KING, 4:19–27

A captive tells an absolute monarch that the dream is about him — grieving for him, sparing him nothing, and begging him to repent

APPALLED	"IT IS YOU"	THE DECREE	THE STUMP	THE PLEA
v. 19	v. 22	vv. 24–25	v. 26	v. 27
compassion	*clarity*	*the sentence, unsoftened*	*the mercy inside it*	*the door held open*
Stunned for a while; "if only the dream applied to those who hate you!"	Plain, second person, no hedging — Nathan's "You are the man!"	Driven out; grass like cattle; seven periods — until you recognize the Most High	"your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules"	"break away now from your sins … mercy to the poor, in case … a prolonging"

THE SAME SHAPE ELSEWHERE IN SCRIPTURE

Nathan to David — "You are the man!" and the child will die, yet "the LORD has taken away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:7–13) · Jonah to Nineveh — forty days, and the city repented and was spared (Jonah 3:4–10)

Paul to Felix — righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, and the governor trembled and put it off (Acts 24:25). Nebuchadnezzar put it off for twelve months.

Twelve Months Later

DANIEL 4:28

All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati sets the roof of the palace beside the plain of Shinar: the same spirit that built Babel builds Babylon, and says the same sentence, let us make a name for ourselves. He notes the twelve months: God…

JOHN MACARTHUR

“While the word was in the king’s mouth.” MacArthur lets the timing preach.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik supplies the record: Nebuchadnezzar’s building inscriptions, Abydenus and the traditions of the king’s madness, and the form of the illness. He also supplies the sermon: pride is a kind of madness, a man forgetting what he is.

THE ORIGINAL **BAVEL RABBETA… BITQOF CHISNI · “BABYLON THE GREAT… BY THE MIGHT OF MY POWER”**

Twelve Months Later

TWELVE MONTHS, ONE SENTENCE, SEVEN TIMES · DANIEL 4:28–37 ON ONE LINE

A year of grace after the warning; a boast answered before it was finished; seven periods as a beast; one look up — and more than was taken



THE STUMP HELD

The kingdom did not fall in the seven years — the counselors and nobles kept the throne and "began seeking me out" (v. 36), exactly as the band of iron and bronze had promised (vv. 15, 26).

God humbled the man and kept his kingdom for him. Discipline that leaves a stump is discipline aimed at restoration (Hebrews 12:6).

Twelve Months Later

"HE IS ABLE TO HUMBLE THOSE WHO WALK IN PRIDE" · THE PATTERN ACROSS SCRIPTURE

The same boast and the same fall, from Babylon's roof to the end of the age — and the one King who went down on purpose and was lifted up

WHO	THE BOAST	THE FALL
Nebuchadnezzar DANIEL 4:30	*"Babylon the great, which I myself have built"*	*seven years as a beast — then restored (4:33–36)*
Uzziah 2 CHRONICLES 26:16	*"when he became strong, his heart was so proud"*	*struck with leprosy at the altar; a king in isolation*
Herod Agrippa ACTS 12:22–23	*"the voice of a god and not of a man"*	*struck by an angel the same hour; no stump*
The rich fool LUKE 12:19–20	*"Soul, you have many goods laid up"*	*"this very night your soul is required of you"*
Babylon the Great REVELATION 18:7–8	*"I sit as a queen … will never see mourning"*	*"in one day her plagues will come"*
The Son of Man PHILIPPIANS 2:8–9	*"He humbled Himself … to the point of death"*	*"God highly exalted Him" — the way down is the way up*

"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" — James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5–6. Nebuchadnezzar and Herod said the same thing; one of them had a stump.

What to carry from this chapter

1

A pagan king wrote this chapter.

The only chapter of Scripture authored by a Gentile emperor, as a decree to every nation, opening with praise and telling his own humiliation.

2

Ruler is the spine of the chapter.

“The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind”, the watcher (verse 17), Daniel (verse 25), the voice (verse 32), the king (verses 34–35).

3

The fall was set up by prosperity.

“At ease… flourishing” (verse 4).

4

The stump is grace inside judgment.

Cut down but not uprooted, banded with iron and bronze (verse 15): the kingdom kept for the man while the man was removed from it.

More to carry

5

Daniel loved the king and told him the truth.

Appalled for his captor, wishing it on his enemies (verse 19), then “it is you, O king” (verse 22) and a plea to repent (verse 27).

6

The sin was the pronouns.

“I myself have built… my power… my majesty” (verse 30).

7

Restoration began with one act.

“I raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me” (verse 34), the opposite of looking out over his own works.

8

The head of gold bowed.

Not the God of Daniel, not the God of Shadrach, but “I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven” (verse 37).

Talk it through

1. Nebuchadnezzar opens his decree with praise before he tells his humiliation. What has God done for you that you have been reluctant to say out loud, and what image are you protecting by keeping it quiet?

2. The dream came when the king was “at ease and flourishing.” In what area of your life are you most comfortable right now, and is that the area where you have stopped listening?

3. “That the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind.” What throne, at work, at home, in ministry, are you treating as yours rather than as bestowed?

4. What would change if you held it as a loan?

CLOSING

He was at ease in his palace; the tree reached the sky; the watcher came down; the prophet wept and said “it is you”; twelve months passed; the word was in his mouth when heaven answered it. Seven years later a beast raised its eyes to heaven and a king came home, and wrote to the whole earth that the Most High rules.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study, reflection journal and film: see the Daniel study page.