

The Book of Daniel

CHAPTER FOUR

The Heart of Nebuchadnezzar

This chapter records the final events surrounding Nebuchadnezzar. In this chapter, God will humble the mighty king. Nebuchadnezzar will be forced to confront his proud heart. The humbling vision in Daniel chapter two had only suppressed his arrogance and self-importance until in chapter three, when he commanded all to worship his image of gold. In chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar shares his humbling experience for all to read. It is a last testament to what God was able to accomplish in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.

This chapter is most unique for several reasons. **First**, it is remarkable because this chapter is an official proclamation (vss. 1-3) to all those in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, concerning the signs and wonders that God did unto him: his pride, his temporary insanity, and deliverance. Typically, a king would never have recorded a document that told of any weakness on his part. Kings were depicted as demi-gods. Archaeologists and historians know this to be true. This fact is, what makes interpreting recorded documents so problematic is their tendency to be tainted, embellished tales in favor of monarchs rather than accurate depictions of the events. This problem is especially so in records of battles: he who wins the battle gets



to tell the tale, regardless of the actual facts. That this chapter is a matter of public record is evidenced by the recorded events concerning Belshazzar, the last king to rule Babylon. Belshazzar inquired of Daniel the interpretation of the writing on the wall, and Daniel recounts the events: **"O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom**

he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will." (Daniel 5:18-21) Thus, here you have Daniel simply stating the historical record of which Belshazzar knew to be true. (Look at Daniel 5:22.)

Secondly, it is unique because Nebuchadnezzar puts in the public record an acknowledgement of the power and greatness of the most High God and His kingdom (vss. 3, 34 -35, 37). Nebuchadnezzar blessed, honored, and praised the most High. This is an amazing public testimony for a king whose God had been Bel. It is also astounding that Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the supremacy of the most High's kingdom, in light of his own kingdom being temporal (vss. 34-35).

All this makes this chapter most unique.

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 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. (Daniel 4:1-3)

These are the final words recorded from Nebuchadnezzar, a man humbled by the mighty hand of God (vs. 37). As stated earlier, the verbiage here has every hallmark of a public edict: "**Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you**" (vs. 4:1 cf. Daniel 6:25). As a result of what transpires in this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar will acknowledge the "**high God,**" the God who is above all, the high and exalted One. This chapter is a public testimony to the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 34-37).

I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told

the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. (Daniel 4:4-7)

The King's Sleepless Night (vss. 4-7): At this time Nebuchadnezzar is at "rest," "flourishing" in his palace (vs. 4). The fact that he was at rest tells us Nebuchadnezzar had completed his military conquests. This chapter takes place towards the end of Nebuchadnezzars' reign, about twenty-three years following chapter two.

Historians who study the writings unearthed from Babylon tell us the subject of dreams and their interpretation composes the largest portion of written material. This shows the importance the Babylonians placed on dreams. Thus, with both the dream of the image in chapter two and with this dream, we see Nebuchadnezzar being "afraid" and "troubled" and desperately seeking someone to interpret the dream. (Daniel 2:1; 3,28; 4:5.)

Nebuchadnezzar's dream in this chapter is unlike the dream in chapter two, for this dream he remembered, and the visions in it. But he did not understand the meaning of the visions, the interpretation. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar makes a decree to bring all the wise men before him and give the interpretation of the vision, however, once again the wise men were unable to do so (vs. 6-7). Here again we see the wise men's failure to know the visions God placed in the king's dream, for the secret things belong to the Lord: "**The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law**" (Deuteronomy 29:29 cf. Da 2:18-19,22,27-30; 4:9). This is the second time God speaks to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream (see Job 33:14-33).

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 before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. (Daniel 4:8-9)

Daniel Before Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 8-9): After the failure of the wise men, Daniel comes before the king. There is speculation as to why Daniel was brought in last, especially given the utter failure of the wise men to interpret the dream in this chapter and in chapter two. There could be several reasons for this: *first*, it could be that sufficient time had passed since the first revelation in chapter two (twenty-three years) and Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dismal failure of the wise men. *Secondly*, it could be that Daniel used his last in line position to place emphasis on the fact that there is but one

God that is a revealer of secret things. Daniel knew that the wise men would not be able to give the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar. He also knew God was able to reveal secret things, unlike the wise men's gods from whom they sought the interpretation (vss. 4:9; 2:22, 29, 47).

In retelling this narrative Nebuchadnezzar says, **"but at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god"** (vs. 8). Two things here to notice, *first* Nebuchadnezzar is admitting that Daniel was named after his god Bel, for Belteshazzar means "A Prince of Bel." This represents what Nebuchadnezzar believed at that time, the time of the events now being recorded. He says further that Daniel has the **"spirit of the holy gods"** (vs. 8, 9). This was Nebuchadnezzar's understanding at that time, however by the end of this chapter he will **"praise and extol and honor the King of heaven"** (vs. 37), not the god Bel. *Secondly*, Nebuchadnezzar says, when speaking to Daniel, that his name **"was"** Belteshazzar. Could this be a subtle hint to the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar? Is he acknowledging that from this moment on, Daniel would not be known by his Babylonian name Belteshazzar because Bel was no longer Nebuchadnezzar's God?

Lastly, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that this must be a secret thing from the LORD which only Daniel could interpret (vs. 9 cf. Da 2:18-19,22,27-30).

Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. (Daniel 4:10-12)

The Vision of a Great Tree (vss. 10-12): In Nebuchadnezzar's dream he saw a very tall tree in the midst of the earth. The tree grew strong, its height reaching up to heaven and spreading out to the ends of the earth. It had fair leaves, fruit to feed the beasts of the field and branches that provided a dwelling for all the fowls of heaven.

The emphasis given to this tree is its greatness: **“the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: ... and all flesh was fed of it” (Daniel 4:9-12).** These details are important to the interpretation (vs. 22).



The Bible offers numerous illustrations of trees representing people, nations, or kingdoms. The blessed man shall be **“like a tree planted by the rivers of water” (Psalm 1:3)**. The wicked man of great power is **“like a green bay tree” (Psalm 37:35)**. David said, **“I am like a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psalm 52:8)**. In the book of Ezekiel, Egypt and Assyria are likened to the cedar tree (**Ezekiel 31:1-18**). In Ezekiel 17, Jeconiah is likened to the **“highest branch of a cedar,”** and Zedekiah is likened to a **“vine of low stature” (Ezekiel 17:1-21)**. The nation of Israel is likened to a **“vineyard”** and Judah the **“choicest vine”** that God planted (**Isaiah 5:1-7**). Israel is also likened to a good olive tree (**Jeremiah 11:16-17**), and in **Romans 11:17-27** you have Gentiles being likened to **“wild olive trees”** who are grafted into the **“natural”** olive tree.

I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his 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 heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter 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 ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee. (Daniel 4:13-18)

The Vision of the Watcher and a Holy One (13-18): The visions of Daniel continue with the vision of the watcher and the holy one descending from heaven (**vs. 13**). It is my understanding that these are two of God's heavenly hosts; thus, you have the "they" of **verses 25, 26, 32**. The angelic realm is made up of a "host" of heavenly beings with varied positions and responsibilities. These are the principalities and powers spoken of by the apostle Paul (**Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Tit 3:1**). The angelic host have a variety of names such as Gabriel and Micheal, and titles like Destroyer, Abaddon or Apollyon, Archangel, prince, and the ones listed here: "**watcher**" and "**holy one.**" We will cover more on this subject in Daniel chapter ten.

As these angels descended there was a great cry to, "**Hew down the tree,**" along with its mighty branches of leaves and fruit, so all the fowls and the beasts that sought shelter and protection from its massive size fled (**vs. 14**). The toppling of the tree stopped short at the stump, with its bands of iron and brass in the field of breasts (**vs. 15**). The stump of the tree with the roots firmly secure in the ground gives the idea that the tree was not to be uprooted, the tree had hope of reviving. Thus, you have the wetness of the dew keeping it alive and the band of iron and brass keep any from destroying it completely. Notice also the statement "**until seven times pass over him**" (**vs. 16**). Here is another promise of a future restoration. The beastly condition of this man is not forever.

The telling of the vision unveils some of the interpretation. The most High said, "**Let his heart be changed from man's heart and let a beast's heart be given unto him and let seven times pass over him**" (**vs. 16**). Thus, the tree is a man who will have his heart changed into that of a beast. Remember, at this point Nebuchadnezzar is only telling what he sees and hears, but does not know the interpretation of the vision. Who is this person, what does it have to do with a tree? These answers and more Nebuchadnezzar had yet to uncover.

The "**watchers**" and the "**holy ones**" are to administer the decree against Nebuchadnezzar from the most High (**vs. 17 cf. 24**). The purpose for the decree against him is clearly stated: "**to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.**" The reality that the most High rules in the kingdoms of men is a biblical truth. When the kings of kingdoms become pride-filled, they follow in the steps of one who did likewise in the heaven and earth- Satan, or Lucifer, the anointed cherub. He is the one who is working behind the kings of this world to exalt themselves in pride. The word of God has many examples, not only here in Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, but also other kingdoms, such as Tyrus. The prince of Tyrus thought his

kingdom was impenetrable, so much so that the heart of the prince of Tyrus was lifted up in pride declaring himself to be God (**Ezekeil 28:6**). In doing this the prince of Tyrus is mirroring the “king” of Tyrus, the anointed cherub, Satan whose heart was also lifted up in the selfsame pride (**vs. 17**). The prince of Tyrus therefore will be judged, to the intent that all the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men. Therefore, the prince of Tyrus, that earthly ruler will die like a man and not a god (**vss. 9-10**). As will Satan, the king of Tyrus (**vss. 17-18**).

There is also the future pride of Babylon. Isaiah says in speaking of a future day when Babylon falls, that a people shall take up a proverb against Babylon saying, **“How hath the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased!”** It will be because of Babylon’s **“pomp”** that she will be brought down to the grave (**Isaiah 14:11**). At that time that others will say, **“Art thou also become weak as we? Art, thou become like unto us?”** (**Isaiah 14:10 cf. Revelation 18:16-18**). In this same passage Isaiah likens Babylon to one who was also lifted up in pride, Lucifer (**Isaiah 14:12-16**). And just as in the case of Tyrus so those at that time will cry, **“Is this man that made the earth to tremble that did shake kingdoms”** (**Isaiah 14:16; see also Revelation 18**).

This is the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (**vs. 18**).

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. (Daniel 4:19-22)

The Interpretation of the Tree (vss. 19-22): Daniel was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. Daniel understood the interpretation and what ill news the information would be to the king. **“Ill news is an ill guest.”** If Daniel handled this wrong, it could mean his very life. The king noticed how the interpretation of the dream disturbed Daniel, therefore he replied, **“let not the dream or the interpretation thereof trouble thee”** (**vs. 19**). Then Daniel tells the king the dream is for those that hate him, and

the interpretation is for his enemies. Daniel seems to be saying that he wishes the dream and its interpretation were for the king's enemies instead of the king.

Daniel retells the dream of the great tree and then simply gives the statements, "**It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth**" (vs. 22). Like the punching words of Nathan the prophet to David, "**thou art the man,**" so Daniel says to the king, "**It is thou, O king.**" And as if this news were not hard enough to deliver, it is about to get more difficult.

And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof 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 heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility. (Daniel 4:23-27)

The Interpretation of the Hewed Tree (vss. 23-27): Daniel once again rehearses the vision of the hewed tree in perfect detail (vs. 23). He then starts to give the interpretation with these words, "**This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king**" (vs. 24). He has more ill news for the king, however the news is softened by Daniel's words "**... which is come upon my lord the king.**"

Daniel continues to interpret the dream, saying these angelic beings will drive Nebuchadnezzar from men, and his dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. He will also eat grass as oxen, as the dew covers him (vs. 25). Nebuchadnezzar will suffer a mental derangement from the Lord until he is humbled to the point of understanding that the most High rules in the kingdoms of men, and He gives those kingdoms to whomsoever he will (vs.25).

Daniel completes the interpretation by explaining that the stump means the king's kingdom will be restored unto him. And following all this, then he will know that the heavens do rule (**vs. 26**).

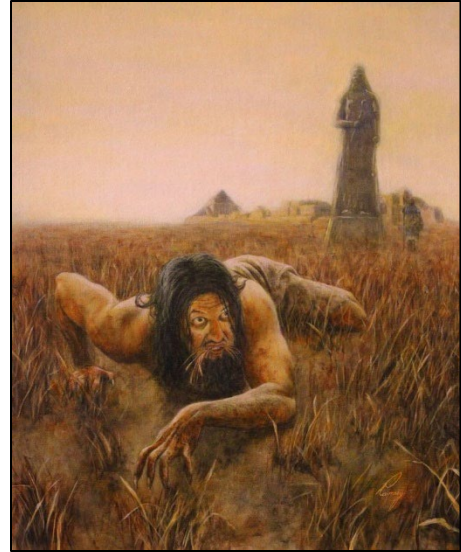
Daniel finishes his time before the king with words of admonishment to repent from sins and iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, and in so doing there would be a lengthening of his tranquility (**vs. 27**). Tranquility, however, is not what Nebuchadnezzar chooses, for instead of obeying the dream he suffers turmoil and unrest in the field of beasts.

All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (Daniel 4:28-32)

The Pride of Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 28-32): This section begins with the sobering words, **"All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar"** (**vs. 28**). All the warnings throughout Nebuchadnezzar's life, including this most recent dream and its interpretive warning could not keep the king from his pride. Twelve months after receiving this last interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar was walking in the palace of his kingdom when conceit overtook him, and the great pride in his heart came forth.

The king boasted for all to hear, **"...is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"** (**vs. 30**). Nebuchadnezzar had not learned that **"the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will"** (**vs. 25, 26**). Note Nebuchadnezzar's prideful claims are made in the first person: **"I have built," "my power," "my majesty"** (**vs. 30**). These are the **"I wills"** associated with the five **"I wills"** Lucifer utters in **Isaiah 14:12-14**. However, Nebuchadnezzar will learn in a most real way, those who walk in pride, God is able to abase (**vs. 37**).

The judgment of God was swift, for when the **“words were in the king’s mouth, there came a voice from heaven”** (vs. 31). Nebuchadnezzar’s mental derangement was instantaneous. From this moment on he was driven from the palace to dwell with the beasts of the field. This swift judgment is similar to the judgment against the children of Israel, when in the wilderness they disobeyed God. **“And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.”** (Numbers 11:33)



The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. (Daniel 4:33)

The Insanity of Nebuchadnezzar (vs. 33): Instantly, Nebuchadnezzar was taken over by some form of mental derangement, like lycanthropy. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was an ox, so he was treated like one. So pronounced was his mental derangement that he was led from the palace to be confined to the royal grounds, eating grass like an ox. The time Nebuchadnezzar spent in this state was so long that his nails grew to look like birds' claws and his matted hair took on the appearance of eagle's feathers.

Think on the severity of this judgment. One moment the king was walking in his royal attire, admiring the splendor of his palace and the greatness of his kingdom, and the very next moment he was reduced to a beast, walking on all fours, eating grass as an ox. What does the Lord hate? **“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look...”** (Proverbs 6:16-19)

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my

kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase. (Daniel 4:34-37)

The Conversion and Restoration of Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 34-37): The narrative now switches to first person. It is Nebuchadnezzar's own testimony about his restoration and conversion, and it all started at the "**end of the days**" when Nebuchadnezzar "**lifted up his eyes to heaven**" (vs. 34). After seven long years, Nebuchadnezzar lifted his eyes to heaven in humility; his heart was restored and his understanding returned (vs. 16 cf. Daniel 7:4).

It was at this time that Nebuchadnezzar blessed and honored and praised the most High. He acknowledges, not only that God is the most High, but also that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is forever (vss. 34-35). By this statement Nebuchadnezzar was submitting to the revelation given in chapter two, that the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, it shall stand forever (2:44). Nebuchadnezzar is not a god; his kingdom will fall, as all kingdoms will to the Kingdom of God.

Then, just as suddenly as the king was driven from men, Nebuchadnezzar's life was restored to the fullest. "**At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.**" (Daniel 4:36)

Nebuchadnezzar's final words are that of a changed man. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled under the mighty hand of God; these final words are a testament to this reality. Read this final verse in chapter four in comparison of Nebuchadnezzar's life recorded in the first three chapters of Daniel. Read them slowly and thoughtfully, for these are the final words of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon: "**Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.**" (Daniel 4:37)