

# The Book of Daniel, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 4: Nebuchadnezzar Humbled and Restored

### Daniel 4:1–37

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this chapter hammers a single nail to the head: the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He will. The phrase recurs three times (4:17, 4:25, 4:32), making it the unmistakable point of the narrative. Even the most powerful man on earth holds his throne only by God's permission, and God will not share His glory with any human pride. Your aim is to help students see the sovereignty of God over all human power, and the offense of pride that tries to claim for self the glory due to God alone.

The second major theme is the relationship between pride, judgment, repentance, and mercy. Nebuchadnezzar is warned, given a year of patience, judged when he persists in pride, and then graciously restored when he humbles himself. This is the pattern of God's dealing with sinners: He warns, He waits patiently, He disciplines, and He restores the humble. Help students see that God's humbling of the proud is not cruelty but mercy, the severe grace that brings a person low enough to finally look up and live.

This lesson is deeply formational, because pride is the most universal and best-disguised of sins. Few students will identify with a tyrant who claims to have built an empire, yet all of us are tempted to take credit for what God has given and to live as though we were self-made. Aim to send students home having honestly examined their own hearts for pride, having recognized God's patient warnings in their lives, and having learned to give God the glory, so that they might be lifted up by humbling themselves rather than humbled by exalting themselves.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its fulfillment are given so "that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (4:17). What does this chapter teach about God's sovereignty over even the most powerful rulers on earth? Why is this a truth every generation needs to relearn?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Anchor the lesson in its thrice-repeated thesis: "the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (4:17, 4:25, 4:32). The narrative is built around this single sentence. God is not merely interested in the kingdoms of men; He governs them, appointing and removing rulers according to His sovereign will. The most powerful man alive is, before God, a steward holding a throne he was given.

Help students grasp how directly this challenges the perennial human assumption that we are the masters of our own destiny. Nebuchadnezzar genuinely believed he had built Babylon by his own power for his own glory. The chapter exists to dismantle that belief, not only for him but for every reader who shares it. We are not self-made; we are God-sustained.

Show why this truth must be relearned in every generation. Human cultures, especially powerful and prosperous ones, drift naturally toward the illusion of self-sufficiency, crediting their achievements to their own greatness and forgetting the God who gives breath and ability. Modern people are no less prone to this than ancient kings; the forms change, the pride does not.

Tie this to the comfort as well as the warning. If God rules the kingdom of men, then no tyrant, no movement, no power is outside His control. The same truth that humbles the proud steadies the faithful. We do not need to fear the powers of this age, because they hold their place only by the permission of the God we serve.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's sovereignty over all human rulers and kingdoms (Daniel 4:17; Psalm 75:6–7).
- The repeated thesis as the deliberate center of the chapter.
- The illusion of self-sufficiency that every powerful culture must unlearn.
- Human beings as stewards, not owners, of all they have been given.
- The comfort that no earthly power is outside God's rule.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God repeat this lesson so insistently in the chapter?
- Where do you see cultures resisting the truth that God is in control?
- How does God's rule over the powerful both warn and comfort us?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*Pride often hides behind real accomplishment, so that we hardly notice it. Where do you sense pride growing in your own heart, perhaps in your work, your knowledge, your reputation, or your sense of being self-made? What is one honest way you can examine yourself for the pride that comes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18)?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question turns the spotlight inward to the sin of pride. Nebuchadnezzar's pride was hidden behind genuine achievement; he really had built a great city. This is what makes pride so dangerous and so hard to detect: it usually attaches itself to our real strengths and successes, where it feels deserved.

Help students examine the subtle forms of pride in ordinary life. It hides in our competence (I am better at this than others), our knowledge (I see what they cannot), our reputation (what people think of me), and the deep sense of being self-made (I earned all of this). Pride rarely announces itself; it must be hunted out.

Offer the diagnostic of Scripture. Pride shows itself in how we receive correction (defensiveness), how we treat those below us (contempt or impatience), how readily we compare ourselves to others, and how much our peace depends on recognition. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18) is a warning to take personally.

Move toward honest self-examination and the humility that invites it. Encourage students to ask God to search them (Psalm 139:23–24), and perhaps to ask a trusted friend where they see pride at work. The first step in defeating pride is the humility to admit it is there.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Pride as the best-disguised sin, attached to our real strengths (Proverbs 16:18).
- The diagnostics of pride: defensiveness, contempt, comparison, craving recognition.
- Self-examination and inviting God to search the heart (Psalm 139:23–24).
- Humility as the necessary first step in confronting pride.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do you sense pride growing in your own heart?
- How do you tend to respond to correction or to others' success?
- Who could you invite to help you see your blind spots?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*When Daniel interprets the dream, he urges the king, “break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed” (4:27). What does this reveal about God’s desire for genuine repentance rather than mere knowledge of judgment? How does true repentance show itself in changed actions, not just changed feelings?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Focus on Daniel’s pastoral plea: “break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed” (4:27). Daniel does not merely interpret the dream of judgment; he calls the king to repentance, and he defines repentance concretely. It is not enough to know judgment is coming; one must turn, and turning shows itself in changed conduct, especially mercy to the oppressed.

Help students see the biblical shape of repentance. It is not mere regret, fear of consequences, or emotional remorse. It is a real turning from sin to righteousness that bears fruit in action (compare Luke 3:8, “bear fruits in keeping with repentance”). Daniel ties it specifically to justice and mercy, the very areas where a proud king was most likely to sin.

Note the hope embedded in Daniel’s appeal: “that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquility” (4:27). God’s warnings are invitations. The announcement of judgment was not a sealed verdict but a summons to repent. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that they turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11).

Apply this to the believer. Knowing the truth about sin and judgment is not the same as repenting of sin. Many people are well-informed about righteousness and still unchanged. True repentance moves from the head to the will to the hands, producing concrete changes in how we live and how we treat others.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Repentance as a real turning from sin that bears fruit in action (Luke 3:8).
- The difference between knowing about judgment and actually repenting.
- God’s warnings as merciful invitations to turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11).
- Repentance expressed concretely in righteousness and mercy to others.
- The insufficiency of regret or remorse without changed conduct.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between feeling sorry and truly repenting?
- How does genuine repentance show itself in changed actions?
- Where might God be calling you to bear fruit in keeping with repentance?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*God gave Nebuchadnezzar a full twelve months between the warning and the judgment (4:29). Where in your life is God patiently giving you time to change something you already know He has put His finger on? What keeps us from responding to His patience while we still have the opportunity?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question presses on God’s patience. A full year passed between the warning and the judgment (4:29). God was not slow or forgetful; He was merciful, giving Nebuchadnezzar ample time to repent. The king’s tragedy was that he wasted the reprieve, presuming on the patience that was meant to lead him to repentance (compare Romans 2:4).

Help students recognize the gift of time in their own lives. There is almost always an area where we already know God is calling for change, and where He has been patiently waiting for us to respond. His patience can be misread as approval or as permission to delay, when it is actually an open door that will not stay open forever.

Name what keeps us from responding to God's patience: presumption (assuming we have plenty of time), comfort (the cost of changing feels higher than the cost of staying), and hardness (the gradual dulling of conscience when we ignore conviction). Each of these turns a gift of mercy into an occasion for ruin.

Move toward urgency without panic. The point is not fear but responsiveness. Encourage students to identify the specific area where God has been patient, and to take a concrete step of obedience now, while the door of His patience stands open. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15).

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's patience as a merciful gift meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).
- The danger of presuming on God's patience and delaying obedience.
- Hardness of heart as the gradual fruit of ignoring conviction (Hebrews 3:15).
- Responsiveness to God's voice while the door of opportunity is open.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is God patiently giving you time to change something?
- What tends to keep you from responding to God's patience?
- What concrete step of obedience could you take while the door is open?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Nebuchadnezzar's fall came the moment he claimed the glory for himself: "this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power... for the glory of my majesty" (4:30). What does this teach about the danger of pride and self-glory, and about Whom all glory truly belongs to (Isaiah 42:8)? Why is pride so offensive to God?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Return to the doctrinal core: the moment of Nebuchadnezzar's fall. Walking on his rooftop, surveying his city, he says, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (4:30). My power. My glory. The judgment falls while the words are still in his mouth. The sin was not building a great city; it was claiming the credit and the glory for himself.

Help students see why pride and self-glory are so offensive to God. God will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8). To take for ourselves the glory that belongs to God is the essence of all sin, the original lie that we can be as God (Genesis 3:5). Pride is not just one sin among many; it is the root rebellion, the refusal to acknowledge that we are creatures dependent on our Creator.

Show the contrast with the truth. Everything Nebuchadnezzar boasted of, his power, his throne, his very breath, was a gift from the God he refused to acknowledge. The proud person lives a lie, attributing to himself what he has only received. The humble person lives in the truth, giving God the glory for all that God has given.

Draw out the seriousness without despair. God's opposition to pride is itself a mercy, because pride is self-destructive; it isolates us from God and from reality. By resisting the proud (James 4:6), God is not being petty but is refusing to leave us in the lie that will destroy us. He humbles the proud in order to save them.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8).
- Pride and self-glory as the root rebellion against the Creator (Genesis 3:5).
- The lie of pride: claiming credit for what we have only received.
- God's opposition to pride as a severe mercy, not pettiness (James 4:6).
- Living in the truth by giving God the glory for all things.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is pride so deeply offensive to God?
- How is pride a kind of lie about where our gifts come from?
- How is God's opposition to the proud actually merciful?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*It is easy to say God deserves the glory, and much harder to live as though our gifts, achievements, and possessions are really His. In what specific area do you most need to start giving God the credit? How might gratitude and humility reshape the way you talk about your own success?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question moves from agreeing that God deserves glory to actually living that way. It is easy to affirm in the abstract that all we have is from God; it is much harder to speak and act as though our abilities, achievements, and possessions are truly His gifts and not our own attainments.

Help students locate the specific area where they most need to give God credit. For one it may be career success spoken of as self-made; for another, intelligence or talent worn as a badge of superiority; for another, material blessing assumed to be simply earned. The question is where our language and attitude quietly steal God's glory.

Offer the practical reshaping that gratitude brings. Gratitude is the great humbler, because it constantly traces every good thing back to its Giver (James 1:17). The person who genuinely thanks God for his gifts cannot easily boast in them, because thanksgiving and boasting cannot occupy the same heart at the same time.

Press toward concrete change in speech and attitude. Encourage students to notice how they talk about their successes this week, to consciously give God credit, and to practice gratitude as a daily discipline. The way we speak about our achievements reveals, and shapes, the posture of our hearts.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Every good gift coming down from the Father of lights (James 1:17).
- Gratitude as the practical humbler of pride.
- The incompatibility of thanksgiving and boasting in the same heart.
- Speech and attitude as revealers of where we assign the glory.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- In what area do you most need to start giving God the credit?
- How does genuine gratitude make boasting impossible?
- How could you change the way you speak about your successes this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Nebuchadnezzar was restored only when he "lifted up his eyes to heaven," and his reason returned, and he blessed the Most High whose dominion is everlasting (4:34). What does it mean that the king's healing came through humble worship and acknowledgment of God? How does true sanity, seeing reality rightly, begin with recognizing who God is and who we are?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Turn to the turning point of restoration. "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" (4:34). The king's healing is bound up with his worship. When he finally looked up and acknowledged God, his sanity returned. The chapter presents true reason and true worship as inseparable.

Help students see the profound claim being made. To live as though we are God, the center of our own universe, the source of our own glory, is not just sinful; it is a kind of madness, a

fundamental break with reality. The God-denying, self-exalting heart is, in the deepest sense, out of its mind. Sanity begins when we see reality rightly: God is God, and we are not.

Show that humble worship is not a diminishment but a restoration of the self. Nebuchadnezzar did not lose himself by bowing to God; he found himself. His reason returned, his kingdom was restored, his greatness was given back, and more was added. The way up is down; we are most truly ourselves when we are lowest before God.

Apply this to the believer. The healthiest, sanest, most grounded life is one ordered around the worship of God. Every disorder of the soul has at its root some refusal to let God be God. To lift our eyes to heaven, to acknowledge Him daily, is not only right worship; it is the path to a rightly ordered mind and life.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- True sanity as seeing reality rightly: God is God and we are not.
- The inseparability of right worship and a rightly ordered mind.
- Self-exaltation as a fundamental break with reality.
- Humble worship as the restoration, not the diminishment, of the self.
- The well-ordered life as one centered on the worship of God.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does the king's healing come through lifting his eyes to heaven?
- How is self-exaltation a kind of madness?
- How does worship of God order and steady the rest of life?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Looking back, Nebuchadnezzar could call his humbling a mercy, because it brought him to God. When has a humbling experience in your own life turned out to be a gift, drawing you closer to God? How does this change the way you view the hard or humbling things you may be facing now?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question invites students to reinterpret their own humblings as mercies. Nebuchadnezzar, looking back, did not resent his downfall; he testified to it as the means by which he came to know God. The severe grace that broke him was the kindest thing that ever happened to him, because it brought him to the truth.

Help students recall their own experiences. Often it is in failure, loss, illness, or humiliation that pride is broken and God becomes real to us. The comfortable and successful seasons rarely

teach us dependence; the low places do. Many believers can trace their deepest growth to their hardest seasons.

Be pastorally careful with those currently in a humbling experience that does not yet feel like mercy. The point is not to tie a bow on present pain or to demand that they feel grateful while still bleeding. The point is to offer hope: that God can use even this, that the One who humbles also restores, and that the looking up may come later than the being brought low.

Move toward a reframing of present difficulty. Encourage students facing a humbling now to ask not only “How do I get out of this?” but “What is God teaching me through this, and how might He be drawing me closer?” The hard thing endured with God often becomes, in time, a gift we would not give back.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Humbling experiences as severe mercies that draw us to God.
- Dependence on God learned most often in the low places.
- The God who humbles being also the God who restores (1 Peter 5:6).
- Reframing present hardship as potential occasion for growth and nearness.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When has a humbling experience turned out to be a gift?
- How might God be drawing you closer through a hard thing now?
- What changes when you ask what God is teaching rather than only how to escape?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Nebuchadnezzar's testimony ends with a sweeping confession: God's "dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation... those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (4:34-37). How does this pagan king's confession echo the great theme of the whole book, that God rules over all the kingdoms of men? And how does it point us to the truth that the only safe place for any human being is in humble submission to the God who alone reigns forever, and ultimately in Christ to whom every knee will bow (Philippians 2:9-11)?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This doctrinal capstone draws the chapter into the great theme of the whole book and forward to its fulfillment in Christ. Nebuchadnezzar's closing confession is breathtaking on the lips of a pagan emperor: God's "dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation... those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (4:34, 4:37). The proudest man on earth ends as a witness to the universal reign of the Most High.

Help students hear how this echoes the central message of Daniel. The book repeatedly insists that the kingdoms of men stand under the kingdom of God, that the Most High rules and gives the kingdom to whom He will. Here that truth is confessed not by a prophet but by a converted king, the very embodiment of human power bowing before divine sovereignty.

Draw the line forward to Christ. The whole movement of Scripture is toward the day when every proud power is humbled and every knee bows, not to Babylon, but to Jesus. God “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:9–11). The God who humbled Nebuchadnezzar has exalted His Son, and to that Son all dominion is given (Daniel 7:14).

Press the application home: the only safe place for any human being is in humble submission to the God who reigns forever, and ultimately at the feet of Christ the Lord. We can bow now, willingly, in glad worship, or we will bow later, unwillingly, in judgment, but bow we will. The wisdom Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way is offered to us as a free gift: humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and in due time He will lift you up (1 Peter 5:6).

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God’s everlasting dominion over all the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:34; 7:14).
- A converted pagan king confessing the central theme of the book.
- The exaltation of Christ as the climax of God’s humbling of the proud (Philippians 2:9–11).
- Every knee bowing to Jesus, willingly now or unwillingly in judgment.
- Humble submission to God as the only safe place for any person (1 Peter 5:6).
- The wisdom of bowing willingly in glad worship today.

#### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does this pagan king’s confession echo the theme of the whole book?
- How does the humbling of pride point forward to every knee bowing to Christ?
- What does it mean to bow willingly now rather than unwillingly later?

#### **Question 10**

##### **Student Question:**

*Look back across the whole chapter, from the great tree cut down to the humbled king blessing heaven. Name one specific way the truth that God alone is exalted, and that He humbles the proud to save them, is reshaping how you will live, work, and worship this coming week.*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone question calls for a personal, concrete response. The aim is to move students from observing a king’s humbling to embracing humility themselves before the God who alone is

exalted. Ask them to look back across the chapter and name where the Spirit is pressing on them.

Help them gather the threads: God's sovereignty over the proud, the hidden growth of pride in the heart, the call to real repentance, the gift of God's patience, the danger of self-glory, and the strange mercy of being humbled. Ask which of these is speaking most directly to them.

Refuse vagueness. "Be more humble" is not a plan. "This week I will give God credit in this area, respond to His patience in this matter, or receive this humbling as from His hand" is concrete and livable. The best answers will be specific and personal.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and then exalted; Christ humbled Himself and was exalted to the highest place (Philippians 2:8-9). We humble ourselves not in fear but in glad imitation of our Lord, trusting the God who lifts up the lowly and is forming the humility of Christ in us (1 Peter 5:6; Philippians 1:6).

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The goal of study as transformation into Christlike humility (Romans 8:29).
- Christ who humbled Himself and was exalted as our pattern (Philippians 2:8-9).
- The God who lifts up the lowly and resists the proud (1 Peter 5:5-6).
- Concrete, named obedience as the fruit of genuine study.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which truth from this chapter is God pressing most on your heart?
- What is one specific way you will walk in humility this week?
- How does the humility of Christ shape your own?