

The Book of Daniel

Lesson 4: Nebuchadnezzar Humbled and Restored -- Daniel 4:1-37

This chapter is unlike anything else in the Bible, because it is a testimony written by a pagan emperor. Nebuchadnezzar, the man who built Babylon and burned Jerusalem, the king who threw three men into a furnace, takes up the pen himself and addresses the whole world: "To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you." And then this proud man does the most unlikely thing imaginable. He tells the story of how God broke him, and he is glad. He wants everyone to know.

It begins, as so much in Daniel does, with a dream that will not let the king rest. He sees a great tree in the middle of the earth, tall and strong, its top touching the sky, its branches sheltering the birds and feeding the beasts. It is a picture of his own greatness, and it is glorious. But then a holy watcher comes down from heaven and cries, "Chop down the tree." Leave the stump, bind it, and let the mind of the man become like the mind of a beast for seven seasons. And the reason is stated plainly, the lesson the whole chapter exists to teach: "that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men."

Daniel, who loved this king despite everything, trembles to tell him the meaning, and then he pleads with him: break off your sins, show mercy to the oppressed, that there might be a lengthening of your tranquility. For twelve months God waits, patient and merciful. And then, one day, walking on the roof of his palace, Nebuchadnezzar says the fatal words out loud: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" My power. My glory. The words are still in his mouth when the sentence falls.

And so the greatest king on earth is driven out to live like an animal, eating grass, his hair like feathers, his nails like claws, until he learns the one thing his power could never teach him: that he is not God. But this is not a story of destruction. It is a story of mercy. At the end of his ordeal Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to heaven, and his reason returns, and his kingdom is restored, and he blesses the Most High. This lesson is about the God who humbles the proud in order to save them, and about the strange grace of being brought low enough to finally look up.

Group Discussion: The whole chapter exists to teach one truth, stated again and again: "the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (4:17, 4:25, 4:32). Why do you think God repeats this lesson so insistently? Where do you see human beings, and whole cultures, still resisting the truth that God, not man, is ultimately in control?

Personal Reflection: Nebuchadnezzar's downfall came in a single proud sentence spoken on a rooftop: "my power... my glory" (4:30). Where are you most tempted to take credit for what is really a gift from God, whether your abilities, your success, or the good things in your life? What

would it look like to live with a daily, honest acknowledgment that everything you have is from God?

Read Daniel 4:1–37

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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)?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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)?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 16:18, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall; James 4:6-10, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, so humble yourselves before the Lord; Isaiah 42:8, the Lord will not give His glory to another; Philippians 2:3-11, the humility of Christ and the name above every name; Luke 18:9-14, the proud Pharisee and the humble tax collector who went home justified.

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