

# From Pride *to* Humility



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 4:1–33, Prov. 14:31, 2 Kings 20:2–5, Jon. 3:10, Dan. 4:34–37, Phil. 2:1–11.*

**Memory Text:** “How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (*Daniel 4:3, NKJV*).

Pride has been called the first sin. It is first made manifest in Lucifer, an angel in the courts of heaven. Thus God says through Ezekiel, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee” (*Ezek. 28:17*).

Pride leads to Lucifer's fall, so he now instills pride in men thus leading them to be against God and so, to go down a path toward destruction. We are all fallen human beings, dependent upon God for our very existence. Any gifts we have, any things that we accomplish with those gifts, come only from God. Hence, how do we dare to be proud, boastful, or arrogant when, in reality, humility should dominate all that we do?

It takes a long time for Nebuchadnezzar to understand the importance of humility. Even the appearance of the fourth man in the fiery furnace (see last week) does not change the course of his life. Only after God takes away his kingdom and sends him to live with the beasts of the field does the king recognize his true status.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 1.

## Is Not This Babylon the Great?

**Read** Daniel 4:1–33. What happens to the king, and why?

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God gives Nebuchadnezzar a second dream. This time, the king does not forget the dream. But because the Babylonian experts fail again, the king summons Daniel to provide the interpretation of the dream. In the dream, the king sees a big tree reaching up to heaven and a heavenly being commanding that the tree be chopped down. Only the stump and roots would be left in the earth and would be wet with the dew of heaven. But what must have troubled Nebuchadnezzar was the part of the dream in which the heavenly being said, “Let his heart be changed from *that of a man*, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him” (*Dan. 4:16, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). Recognizing the seriousness of the dream, Daniel politely expresses the wish that the dream would refer to the enemies of the king. However, faithful to the message conveyed by the dream, Daniel says that in fact the dream refers to the king himself.

Trees are commonly used in the Bible as symbols of kings, nations, and empires (*Ezekiel 17: 31; Hosea 14; Zech. 11:1, 2; Luke 23:31*). So, the big tree is a fitting representation of an arrogant king. God gives Nebuchadnezzar dominion and power; nevertheless, he persistently fails to recognize that everything he possesses comes from God.

**Focus** on Daniel 4:30. What does the king say that shows he still does not grasp the warning that the Lord has given him?

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Perhaps what’s so dangerous about pride is that it can lead us to forget just how dependent we are upon God for everything. And once we forget that, we are on dangerous spiritual ground.

**What things have you accomplished in your life? Can you take pride in them without being proud? If so, how so?**

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## Warned by the Prophet

**Read** Daniel 4:27. Besides the warning about what will happen, what does Daniel tell the king to do, and why? (See also Prov. 14:31.)

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Daniel not only interprets the dream but also points Nebuchadnezzar to a way out of his situation: “Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity” (*Dan. 4:27, NKJV*).

Nebuchadnezzar performs a massive work of building in Babylon. The gardens, a system of canals, and hundreds of temples and other building projects turn the city into one of the wonders of the ancient world. But such splendor and beauty, at least in part, is accomplished through exploitation of slave manpower and neglect of the poor. Furthermore, the wealth of the empire is used to gratify the pleasures of the king and his entourage. Thus, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar not only prevents him from acknowledging God, but, as a consequence, also makes him oblivious to the hardships of those in need. Given the special care that God shows for the poor, it is not surprising that from the other possible sins that Daniel could have highlighted before the king, he singles out the sin of neglecting the poor.

The message to Nebuchadnezzar is by no means something new. The Old Testament prophets often warn God’s people against oppressing the poor. Indeed, prominent among the sins that bring about the king’s exile is neglect of the needy. After all, compassion for the poor is the highest expression of Christian charity; conversely, exploitation and neglect of the poor constitutes an attack on God Himself. In caring for the needy, we recognize that God owns everything, which means that we are not owners but merely stewards of God’s property.

By serving others with our possessions, we honor God and recognize His Lordship. It is God’s ownership that should ultimately determine the value and function of material possessions. This is where Nebuchadnezzar fails, and we risk failing too, unless we recognize God’s sovereignty over our accomplishments and manifest our recognition of this reality by helping those in need.

## “The Most High Rules . . .”

Despite his being told to repent and seek God’s forgiveness, Nebuchadnezzar’s unrelenting pride causes the heavenly decree to be executed (*Dan. 4:28–33*). While the king is walking in his palace and praising himself for what he has accomplished, he is afflicted with a mental condition that forces his expulsion from the royal palace. He may have experienced a pathological mental condition called clinical lycanthropy or zoanthropy. Such a condition leads the patient to act like an animal. In modern times this disease has been called “species dysphoria,” the feeling that one’s body is of the wrong species and, hence, the desire to be an animal.

**Read 2 Kings 20:2–5; Jonah 3:10; and Jeremiah 18:7, 8. What do these texts tell us about the king’s chance to have averted the punishment?**

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Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar has to learn the hard way. When invested with royal power, Nebuchadnezzar has no ability to reflect on his relationship with God. Thus, by depriving the king of royal authority and sending him to live with the beasts of the field, God gives the king an opportunity to acknowledge his total dependence on Him. In fact, the ultimate lesson God wants to teach to the arrogant king is that “Heaven rules” (*Dan. 4:26, NKJV*). Indeed, the judgment upon the king has an even larger purpose in God’s design, as so clearly expressed in the decree of the heavenly beings: “ ‘In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men’ ” (*Dan. 4:17, NKJV*).

In other words, the discipline applied to Nebuchadnezzar should be a lesson for all of us, as well. Because we belong to the group of “the living,” we should pay better attention to the main lesson we are supposed to learn that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.”

**Why is knowing that the Most High rules so important a lesson for us to learn? How should this knowledge, for instance, impact how we treat those over whom we have power?**

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## Lifting Eyes Toward Heaven

**Read** Daniel 4:34–37. How, and why, do things change for the king?

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God allows Nebuchadnezzar to be stricken by a strange disease, but eventually He readily restores him to a sound mental state. Interestingly, everything changes when, at the end of the seven years predicted by the prophet, the ailing king lifts up his eyes to heaven (*Dan. 4:34*).

“For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was an astonishment to all his subjects; for seven years he was humbled before all the world. Then his reason was restored and, looking up in humility to the God of heaven, he recognized the divine hand in his chastisement. In a public proclamation he acknowledged his guilt and the great mercy of God in his restoration.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 520.

No question, great changes can happen when we lift our eyes to heaven. As soon as his understanding comes back, the king gives evidence that he has learned this lesson.

But this story is not as much about Nebuchadnezzar as it is about the mercy of God. The king has missed three previous opportunities to accept the God of Israel as the Lord of his life. Such occasions are available to him when he recognizes the exceptional wisdom of the four young Judean captives (*Daniel 1*), when Daniel interprets his dream (*Daniel 2*), and when the three Hebrew men are rescued from the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3*). After all, if that rescue doesn't humble him, what will? In spite of the ruler's stubbornness, God gives him a fourth chance, finally wins the king's heart, and restores him to his royal office (*Daniel 4*). As the case of Nebuchadnezzar illustrates, God gives one chance after another in order to restore us to a right relationship with Him. As Paul writes many centuries later, the Lord “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV*). We see in this story a powerful example of that truth.

**What are ways that you have been humbled by God? What did you learn from the experience? What changes might you need to make in order to avoid having to get taught the lesson again?**

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## Humble and Grateful

**The** repentant king declares: “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing” (*Dan. 4:35*). Given the context, what important point is he making?

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How do we know that Nebuchadnezzar indeed genuinely accepts the true God? We find a major piece of evidence in the fact that Nebuchadnezzar himself is the author of the letter inserted by Daniel in chapter 4. Indeed, most of this chapter seems to be a transcription of a letter that the king distributes to his vast kingdom. In this letter, the king tells about his pride and insanity, and humbly recognizes God’s intervention in his life. Ancient monarchs would rarely write anything derogatory about themselves. Virtually all ancient royal documents that we know of glorify the king. A document such as this, therefore, in which the king admits his pride and his beastly behavior, points to a genuine conversion. In addition, by writing a letter recounting his experience and humbly confessing God’s sovereignty, the king is acting as a missionary. He can no longer keep to himself what he has experienced and learned from the true God. What we have seen here, then, in the king’s prayer and praise (*Dan. 4:34–37*), reveals the reality of his experience.

The king now has a different set of values and can recognize the limitations of human power. In a profound prayer of thanksgiving, the king extols the power of Daniel’s God and admits that “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing” (*Dan. 4:35, NKJV*). That is to say, humans have nothing of themselves of which to be boastful. Thus, this last glimpse of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel shows a king humble and grateful, singing the praises of God and warning us against pride.

Of course, God continues to change lives today. No matter how proud or sinful people may be, in God there is mercy and power to turn rebellious sinners into children of the God of heaven.

**Read Philippians 2:1–11. What do we find here that should eradicate pride in our lives?**

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**Further Thought:** “The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, ‘I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.’

“God’s purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 “Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. . . . [T]he more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, ‘How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?’ The point is that each person’s pride is in competition with everyone else’s pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 110. What is Lewis saying here that could perhaps help you see pride in your own life?
- 2 A theme seen in this chapter, as well as in some preceding it, is the sovereignty of God. Why is this such an important topic to understand? What role does the Sabbath play in helping us understand this crucial truth?