

## LESSONS FROM A KING

*When God Humbles You*

Daniel 4

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### BUILDING GREATNESS

There is a desire and delight in mankind to build something bigger and better. The modern rally cry to "Go Big or Go Home!" is a challenge to motivate someone to accomplish a great task, with an unwillingness to settle for anything less. This drive to build and expand in areas of architecture, technology, personal business has led to some remarkable feats of ingenuity and achievement. The Hoover Dam is an example of extraordinary engineering combined with initiative and purpose. It was dedicated on September 30, 1935 by President Roosevelt.

"Situated on the Nevada-Arizona border, 30 miles southeast of Las Vegas, and stretching 1,244 feet across the Black Canyon, Hoover Dam took five years to construct. Built to control flooding along the Colorado River and provide water and hydroelectric power for California and the Southwest, the dam spurred tremendous growth in that part of the United States. **An entire city was created for people working on the dam.** In the early 1930s, Boulder City, Nevada, was constructed to house 5,000 dam project workers. **It once was the Earth's tallest dam** [726.4 feet]. Hoover Dam's power plant was the world's largest hydroelectric station from 1939 to 1949. **Hoover Dam created America's largest reservoir.** Formed by the damning of the Colorado River, Lake Mead, the nation's largest reservoir, covers about 248 square miles and is capable of holding some 28.9 million acre-feet of water. Today, the reservoir supplies water to farms, businesses and millions of people in Nevada, Arizona, California and Mexico."<sup>1</sup>

### ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

One of the most spectacular rulers of history who constructed amazing building projects in his own day was Nebuchadnezzar. During his lifetime he built Babylon into one of the greatest world empires, yet only lasted during his reign. The might of the Babylonian Empire was from 625-538B.C. Under King Nabopolassar and his son, Nebuchadnezzar, the might of the Babylonian kingdom flashed across the timeline of history as quickly as it faded away.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/history-lists/7-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-hoover-dam>

Babylon had once been great and influential in centuries past under King Hammurabi (*Hammurabi Code*). But since that time, they had been subject to Assyrian rule. Babylon began to expand from the east toward the west and south of Palestine. Egypt was expanding at the same time into the north and east. Their armies collided at the city Carchemish where Nebuchadnezzar ingeniously and swiftly defeated the Egyptians, driving them farther back home. After the battle, Nabopolassar died of old age and sickness. Nebuchad. returned home for the funeral to be announced king in 605B.C. He was an energetic and intelligent war general. After defeating a nation, he would plunder their riches to build up his home city of Babylon. In 598B.C., he captured Jerusalem taking King Jehoiakim and several of the noble families (including Daniel & co.) back to the heart of the Babylonian empire. This group was treated well, being retrained in the customs and government of Babylon.

Babylon enjoyed tremendous economic growth, homeland security, city improvements and incredible architectural works. The “Hanging Gardens” were under his design, famous as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. There were advancements in law, literature, religion, and astronomy (calendar divisions dividing days into two-12 hour periods). There was also a sense of great national pride as Babylon became great under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar.

As the king, he was seen as the absolute authority over the known world at that time. In the book of Daniel, an important biblical theme stands in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar's claims: **GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OVER ALL RULERS AND NATIONS IN PREPARATION FOR THE COMING TRUE KING.** The book of Daniel introduces us to several key figures who were part of God's plan and under His control. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated God-glorifying responses to God's sovereignty in the midst of their difficult circumstances. In contrast, King Nebuchadnezzar Was confronted with choices to respond to God's authority over his life as he interacted with these godly men. All witnessed God's power and authority, but each responded to Him in very different ways.

The key passage that underlines God's sovereign control over the nations is found in **DANIEL 2:19-23** during one of these confrontations. Arriving at Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar had been confronted on three occasions with the One True God. Each instance further verified the truth that the Most High God has absolute authority and control over all people and empires. Each time Nebuchadnezzar reacts with a response of praise and awe, but not enough to finally submit to the Most High. Just as he was given chances to respond to God's absolute authority, you also have choices to respond to God's absolute authority in your life. **DANIEL 4 DISPLAYS GOD'S ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OVER ALL PEOPLE AND YOUR RESPONSE TO HIS RULE IN YOUR LIFE.**

## I. A KING'S TESTIMONY [4:1-27]

**Daniel 4:1** *King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! <sup>2</sup>It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup>How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

This section of Daniel is unique in Scripture because it is the personal testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar, after his confrontation with God. This incident took place about 30 years after the events of ch.3, well into the success and stability of his kingdom. After attending God's school of humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims the lesson he learned under God's mighty hand. He wanted everyone in the kingdom to know what had happened and why. Before the details of the account are related, he opens with a confession of praise to "the Most High God," repeated 6 times throughout the chapter. He then closes his testimony with a similar song of praise and the point of this encounter. "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble." (4:37) As he relates his path of pride under God's absolute authority, the character of pride is displayed in the king's attitude and actions toward God.

### GOD'S GRACIOUS WARNING

Nebuchadnezzar unashamedly relates all the details of his encounter with God. In his previous dealings, he had only been witness to the work and power of God through Daniel and friends. Now God was directly addressing the king's current condition and divinely warning him of the collision course his pride was hurling him towards. The purpose of this vision is found in 4:17, "to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men."

After Daniel reveals the dreams interpretation, he personally pleads with the king to repent of his ways. I believe it is because of the godly character and righteous influence of Daniel that God graciously warns Nebuchadnezzar of the plan He is about to perform on him. *How many of you have seen God's work or received God's warning, yet have not repented?* God uses righteous individuals to confront you in your sin, or graciously plead with you to turn away from the disaster you are hurtling towards. It might seem utterly foolish for Nebuchadnezzar to have ignored so direct and clear warning, but God has clearly and directly spoken to us in His Word and through His Son. It is incumbent upon each person to heed the clear words of God.

## II. RESPONSE OF PRIDE [4:28-33]

**Daniel 4:28** *All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>29</sup> At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,<sup>30</sup> and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"*

### PRIDE'S DEFINITION

The next sentence drips with the irony of Nebuchadnezzar pride. The Scripture doesn't tell us whether he did amend his ways temporarily or not, the point is there was no lasting change in his life. One year later as Nebuchadnezzar proudly admires his palatial majesty and as the words are falling from his lips, Divine judgment falls from heaven. In that moment all God's words are proved true.

*Pride* is the biggest sin which comes between us and God, manifesting itself in many small ways as the enemy to humility. Pride caused the fall of Satan in heaven; likewise, the first man and woman on earth. We might readily admit our struggle with pride, but how rarely do you strive to actually kill it!

*High view of self; seeking your own selfish desires, pursuing self-recognition, and wanting control for selfish purposes.*

*"Contending for supremacy with God, and lifting up our hearts against Him."<sup>2</sup>*

In OT Hebrew, 6 different words are used for pride meaning "lifting up", "magnifying"; "rebelliousness of self". In NT Greek, there are 2 categories for pride: "stretching one's neck", "to be haughty"; "blindness". All these demonstrate having a high view of self and a lowly opinion of those around. Pride is all about setting self at the center.

### ARROGANT OF SELF-ACHIEVEMENT

God had given fair warning to the king on several previous occasions, then specifically in a dream. Daniel was selected for the task of delivering the meaning. The primary charge by God against the king was his refusal of God's authority over his life and empire, while boasting in self accomplishment.

**Daniel 4:25** *... You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

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<sup>2</sup> C.J. Mahaney, *Humility, True Greatness*, 31

From a worldly perspective, Nebuchadnezzar had accomplished much and rose to the position of highest power in the world. Yet his knowledge and encounter with the people of the Most High God was enough to hold him responsible for his attitude and actions. God graciously confronted him with his sin, but the king couldn't get past his own arrogance. It is our own self-deception for us to believe you are ever in control of your life circumstances.

**Daniel 4:29** *At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,<sup>30</sup> and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"*

*"He failed to give God the glory. That verse is the expression of Nebuchadnezzar's heart and of our hearts apart from the grace of God. We think that we are responsible for what we do and achieve, and we do not recognize that even when we achieve great things it is because God, the giver of all good gifts, has given us the ability to achieve them."<sup>3</sup>*

## IGNORING GOD'S WORD

It was only one year after receiving a direct warning from God that the king forgot God's word and became enamored with his own work. In dramatic fashion, God Himself addressed Nebuchadnezzar from heaven immediately carrying out His judgment on the king. The king lost his authority and sanity, being driven away from his palace while living like an animal. Pride drives a wedge between the truth of God and our remembrance to apply it to our lives.

*"Nebuchadnezzar's insanity has features that are associated with the mental disorder known as boanthropy, in which the person so afflicted imagines himself to be an ox or a similar animal and behaves accordingly."<sup>4</sup>*

*How well do you recognize specific areas of pride in your life? God has a clear and adamant hatred of pride:*

**Proverbs 6:16** *There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him:<sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

**Matthew 23:12** *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

**1 Peter 5:5** *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

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<sup>3</sup> James M. Boice, *Daniel*, 51

<sup>4</sup> *The NET Bible, Version 1.0*, (Biblical Studies Foundation, 2004, 2005)

*“You and I hate nothing to the degree that God hates pride. His hatred for pride is pure, and His hatred is holy... God’s opposition to pride is an immediate and constant activity. The proud will not indefinitely escape discipline.”<sup>5</sup>*

### III. RESPONSE OF HUMILITY [4:34-37]

**Daniel 4:34** *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, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;<sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”*

#### HUMILITY’S DEFINITION

*High view of God and putting others above self; serving, pursuing, and desiring to glorify God in all things.*

*“Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God’s holiness and our sinfulness.”<sup>6</sup>*

Humility is that golden key to a righteous life that unlocks all the godly qualities God has given you to possess. It is actively the opposite of pride, drawing the attention and grace of God in your life.

**Isaiah 66:2** *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*

*“Humility draws the gaze of our Sovereign God... God is decisively drawn to humility. The person who is humble is the one who draws God’s attention, and in this sense, drawing His attention means also attracting His grace – His unmerited kindness.”<sup>7</sup>*

#### LISTEN TO GOD’S WORDS

God’s drastic activity in the life of Nebuchadnezzar brought the change He required. God’s grace restored the king’s reason and sanity, which he promptly responded with praise and honor to the Most High God. The king’s prayer of praise is similar to Daniel’s (2:20-23), showing the influential impact on his life. Heeding God’s warning would have thwarted this judgment; but the lesson learned was the intended result.

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<sup>5</sup> Mahaney, 33

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19, 20

**Psalm 25:9** *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

**Proverbs 3:34** *Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*

**James 4:6** *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

**1 Peter 5:5** *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,*

*"This is the promise of humility. God is personally and providentially supportive of the humble."<sup>8</sup>*

#### ACCEPT GOD'S TOTAL CONTROL

The humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar was to teach him God's sovereign authority over all the affairs of men. Every ruling authority receives its power by God's permission alone. God's kingdom is greater than man's because it is eternal, limitless in power, beyond our control, accountable to no one and always triumphant. In acknowledging God's absolute authority, the king understood his position and purpose under God's rule.

**Daniel 4:37** *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

*How well do you respond to God's authority over your life?*

It is refreshing to remember that God does not ask us to do something He Himself hasn't first demonstrated (except to repent of sin). Our example and motivation in humility is Jesus Christ Himself. God's loving motivation to leave the holy splendor and majesty of heaven to become a man and make Himself submissive to His own creation – even being killed by His creation – was the ultimate act of humility ever demonstrated. If Jesus Christ humbled Himself in obedience to God and willingness to die for His enemies, then there is nothing to extreme for you to be able to humble yourself.

**Philippians 2:5** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 21

*bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Accepting God's authority is not a question of "if" but "when". There will come a day when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. At that final day for those who did not previously submit their lives to Jesus Christ's authority, it will be too late to receive God's merciful forgiveness of sins.

God will humble the proud; and does. However, you cannot afford to wait for a "Nebuchadnezzar experience", assuming you will turn to God. The opportunity to choose humility is now!

As we humble ourselves, we find ourselves exalted in the role God has called us to fill, that of light bearers, reflectors of the glory of God. We find that God uses people as inconspicuous and unimpressive as ourselves to bring people, even like Nebuchadnezzar, to the knowledge of Himself.<sup>9</sup>

#### RESPONDING TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

1. Do you live with a confident awareness that God is in complete control of all things at all times?
2. Like Daniel, are you continually humble before God and others knowing it is God Who gives you everything you have?
3. Is there a *pattern* in your life of not listening and obeying God's Word, because you give into pride?
4. Are you going to wait for God to humble you in your pride, or will you go to Him first asking for a heart of humility?

*1 Peter 5:6*

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<sup>9</sup> Boice, 56