

# **Daniel**

## **From Pride to Humility**

Lesson #5 for February 1, 2020

Scriptures: Daniel 4; Proverbs 14:31; 2 Kings 20:2-5; Jonah 3:10; Philippians 2:1-11.

1. There are two sides to the war in the great controversy. We, of course, immediately think of God versus Satan. But, there are also basic principles behind each of those governments: For God's side it is love; for Satan's side it is selfishness.
2. Pride has been called the first great sin. (Revelation 12:7-12) Lucifer thought that he was good enough so that he should be equal with Jesus Christ or even take His place! (Ezekiel 28:17) So, pride, jealousy, and selfishness—three different manifestations of the same kind of sin—led to Lucifer's fall and all the evil that has come from it. Love requires one to have freedom of choice.
3. Are we willing to admit in our day that everything good that we might have ever done, and all the capabilities that we have to do good or evil, were all given to us by God? In the life of a Christian, there should be no place for proud, boastful, arrogant behavior. But, humility is not easy.
4. Benjamin Franklin once wrote that he had 13 things he wanted to accomplish in life. The last one was to be humble. But, he finally admitted defeat when he realized that he was proud that he was so humble!
5. In our lesson for this week, God takes a very unusual approach to dealing with Nebuchadnezzar's pride. He took away his kingdom and turned him into what essentially was an animal. But, somehow, at the end of all that, Nebuchadnezzar's mind got straightened out again, and he recognized the truth. But, we need to be honest, lunacy does not cause one to think clearly. At what point did he come to his senses and realize what had happened?
6. This lesson is based on **Daniel 4:1-33**.
7. God gave Nebuchadnezzar another dream. And this time, he was able to remember it. We do not know why his experts could not give him an interpretation. Was it because they realized the implications of the dream and were afraid to tell the king? Or, did God prevent them from seeing the implications? When Daniel realized the import of the dream, his first words were: "Your Majesty, I wish that the dream and its explanation applied to your enemies and not to you." (Daniel 4:19, *GNB\**) While interpreting the dream for him, Daniel said these words to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Let his heart be changed from **that of a man**, Let him be given the heart of the beast, And let seven times pass over him." (Daniel 4:16, *NKJV\*†*) Do you think either Daniel or Nebuchadnezzar realized the implications of that sentence at the time? Probably not!
8. Plants and especially trees are often used in the Bible as symbols for kings or even nations or empires. Ezekiel 17 talks about Israel's relationship with Babylon and Egypt. Ezekiel 31 describes Egypt as a tree. Hosea 14 describes Israel as a tree. For thousands of years, the country of Lebanon has been famous for its trees. (See Zechariah 11:1-2.) Jesus Himself talked about the wood from trees in Luke 23:31.
9. Twelve months after receiving that vision, we have these words from Nebuchadnezzar:  
**Daniel 4:30:** He said, "Look how great Babylon is! I built it as my capital city to display my power and might, my glory and majesty."—American Bible

Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Daniel 4:30). New York: American Bible Society.

10. Maybe the most dangerous thing about pride and selfishness is that we tend to forget God.
11. Daniel had very clearly warned the king and told him specifically what he needed to deal with.

**Daniel 4:27:** “So then, Your Majesty, follow my advice. Stop sinning, do what is right, and be merciful to the poor. Then you will continue to be prosperous.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

12. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar’s treatment of the poor was the thing that stands out in this interpretation of the dream?
13. There is no question about the fact that ancient Babylon was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Marvelous accomplishments took place there.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, January 27.

Babylon covered an area of approximately two square miles. The total length of its inner and outer walls was about thirteen miles long; the double wall fortifying the city measured more than ninety-six feet in width. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 795.) It was a religious center without rival. “A cuneiform tablet of Nebuchadnezzar’s time lists 53 temples dedicated to important gods, 955 smaller sanctuaries, and 384 street alters—all of them within the city confines.”—Page 797. The center of Babylon’s glory was the famous temple tower Etemenanki, dedicated to the god Marduk, which was 300 feet square at the base and more than three hundred feet high. In ancient times it was only surpassed by the two great pyramids at Giza in Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar’s reputation as a builder has been preserved in the writings of the Babylonian priest Berossus. (See Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.19.)—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2004, page 48 in the section for Wednesday, October 20, 2004].<sup>§</sup>

As you might suspect biblical critics have dismissed this chapter as pure nonsense because they claim there is no extra-biblical verification for it. However, a Babylonian cuneiform text published in 1975 may refer to Nebuchadnezzar’s madness. The text states that the king:

“gave contradictory orders, refused to accept counsel, showed love neither to son or daughter, neglected his family, and no longer performed his duties as head of state.” (See Siegfried H. Horn, in *Ministry*, April 1978, page 40.)

14. Oppression of the poor was a disease affecting almost every nation and many of the kings and wealthy people in ancient times. For example, see Nehemiah 5.
15. Could a true Christian really exploit the poor? The poor are also the children of God.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, January 27.

16. Read Daniel 4:28-33. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar's condition during those seven years, was somehow a natural result of his pride? Or, was that condition caused by a specific action of God? What happened to Nebuchadnezzar is not an unknown phenomenon. There are some diseases known as *species dysphorias* which cause people to think that they are in the wrong species and wanting to be animals. Two specific examples have been named with the following definitions in *Merriam-Webster online dictionary*:

**Lycanthropy:** 1) "a delusion that one has become a wolf" and 2) "the assumption of the form and characteristics of a wolf held to be possible by witchcraft or magic."

**Zoanthropy:** "a monomania in which a person believes himself changed into an animal and acts like one."

17. Do we have other examples of individuals or groups avoiding serious problems like this one because they repented? Hezekiah was very ill, and Isaiah told him he would die.

**2 Kings 20:2-5:** <sup>2</sup> Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed: <sup>3</sup> "Remember, LORD, that I have served you faithfully and loyally, and that I have always tried to do what you wanted me to." And he began to cry bitterly.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah left the king, but before he had passed through the central courtyard of the palace the LORD told him <sup>5</sup> to go back to Hezekiah, ruler of the LORD's people, and say to him, "I, the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you, and in three days you will go to the Temple."—*Good News Bible.\**

**Jonah 3:10:** <sup>10</sup> God saw what they did; he saw that they had given up their wicked behaviour. So he changed his mind and did not punish them as he had said he would.—*Good News Bible.\** [Was this a conditional prophecy?]<sup>†</sup>

**Jeremiah 18:7-8:** [The LORD said:] <sup>7</sup> "If at any time I say that I am going to uproot, break down, or destroy any nation or kingdom, <sup>8</sup> but then that nation turns from its evil, I will not do what I said I would."—*Good News Bible.\**<sup>‡</sup>

18. Despite the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had already seen the superiority of *Yahweh* over all human beings and over all false gods on three different occasions, it seems he had to learn the hard way. The young men from Judah had excelled in their university course and had been promoted to high positions in his kingdom. Then he had that dream as recorded in Daniel 2 which he tried to modify to his own liking. That was followed by the story on the plain of Dura with the three young men surviving the fires. And Nebuchadnezzar, once again, realized that this was a kind of God like nothing he had ever seen before.

19. **Daniel 4:34-37:** <sup>34</sup> "When the seven years had passed," said the king, "I looked up at the sky, and my sanity returned. I praised the Supreme God and gave honour and glory to the one who lives for ever.

"He will rule for ever,

and his kingdom will last for all time.

<sup>35</sup> He looks on the people of the earth as nothing;  
angels in heaven and people on earth  
are under his control.  
No one can oppose his will  
or question what he does.

<sup>36</sup> “When my sanity returned, my honour, my majesty, and the glory of my kingdom were given back to me. My officials and my noblemen welcomed me, and I was given back my royal power, with even greater honour than before.

<sup>37</sup> “And now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, honour, and glorify the King of Heaven. Everything he does is right and just, and he can humble anyone who acts proudly.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

20. This appears to be a kind of letter sent out by Nebuchadnezzar to describe what happened to him and the results. Somehow, at the end of that experience, everything changed.

21. Have you ever wondered what people thought when they saw Nebuchadnezzar in that condition, eating grass like an animal? Was the statement above a result of insanity?

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*\* 520.2.

22. What is implied by the statement: “I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me”? (Daniel 4:34, *KJV*\*)

23. Despite Nebuchadnezzar’s previous encounters with the God of heaven, God was still merciful and kind and gave him this final opportunity to change his attitudes. Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his royal office. We do not know who was in charge of the kingdom during those seven years. Could it have been Daniel? Most Oriental potentates after ruling for seven years would not have been willing to restore the kingdom to the previous ruler! Why didn’t the new king get rid of Nebuchadnezzar?

24. Have you ever had the experience of being humbled by God? What did you learn?

25. So, what was Nebuchadnezzar’s final conclusion?

**Daniel 4:35** [as above]: He looks on the people of the earth as nothing;  
angels in heaven and people on earth  
are under his control.  
No one can oppose his will  
or question what he does.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

26. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar will end up in God’s kingdom? What evidence is there for that possibility? If you search through ancient writings other than the Bible, you will discover that it is almost unheard of for any words to be spoken against a ruling king. And for a ruling king to admit his errors and talk about his downfall and his pride and insanity is truly unique.

27. Nebuchadnezzar had become an evangelist for *Yahweh*, the true God!
28. Shouldn't we as Christians, by following the example of Jesus, have a similar experience? Read **Philippians 2:1-11**. That will end the great controversy. Then consider the following:

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* 521.2-3.

29. Historical records show that Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon for more than twice as long as all his successors put together. There is no evidence that any of them learned the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned.

"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.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Friday, January 31].

30. There are three main themes that stand out in this lesson. The dangers of pride, the advantages of humility, and the sovereignty of God.

There is a Nebuchadnezzar in everyone. To overcome pride and become humble is an ideal we cannot achieve in human terms. Humility is an elusive goal. As soon as we think we have reached it, it is already lost. But Jesus can give us power to overcome our arrogance and live a humble life. He can change every "temptation to pride into an opportunity for gratitude."—Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today's World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), p. 94.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 65.

"He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals."—*Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1739; famous quotation from Benjamin Franklin.

31. Why do you think God chose this way of disciplining Nebuchadnezzar? Doesn't it seem extreme? What is amazing is that this form of insanity continued for seven literal years.

Then, God healed his mental illness, and he humbly admitted the sovereignty of God over the entire universe, and he was restored to his throne. Each of those three events is quite amazing. Are we willing to learn from Scripture and modify our lives appropriately?

32. Some people have tried to figure out some way to reinterpret the seven years to mean something other than seven literal years. But, there is considerable evidence that it needs to be interpreted in a literal way.
33. Do we need a kind of Nebuchadnezzar experience in our lives today?
34. Wasn't there any other way for God to bring Nebuchadnezzar to his senses except this extreme example?

**1. How do you evaluate your own accomplishments when compared to those of others? How do you tell the difference between pride and a high self-esteem?**

**2. In your opinion, how can we show and experience genuine humility? What is the difference between humility and a low self-esteem?**

**3. What is the place of humility in church leadership? Do you think a humble leader can be respected and followed? Explain.**

**4. In what ways has Jesus taught humility? On what occasion of Jesus' ministry did He exemplify humility in the most powerful way? What, and how, can you learn from Him?**

**5. What do you perceive to be the relationship between humility and forgiveness? How difficult is it for you to forgive someone who offends you?**

**6. This week's lesson opens the possibility for some self-examination. Ask your class members to reflect on the following: Try to put yourself in the shoes of Nebuchadnezzar, and ask yourself:**

- Do I tend to take credit for certain accomplishments more than I deserve? In what ways do I tell my personal stories? Do I tell them to look better or more successful than I really am?
- What steps must I take in order to attain humility?
- Have there been any situations in my life in which I was humbled in ways that helped me to understand my limitations and hence to honor God? If so, how?
- How often do I remember to give God the glory for everything that I may have accomplished? What can help me remember always to give the glory to Him?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 68-69. [How will we reach everyone in the world including all the poor with the gospel?]<sup>‡</sup>

35. Is high self-esteem ever a safe attitude? What is the relationship between a low self-esteem and humor humility?

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