

DAY 5 - JANUARY 12, 2026

Humbling the Proud (Daniel 4-5)

We are combining two stories, since they both deal with arrogance and humbling.

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Mental Illness (Daniel 4)

Q1. (Daniel 4:10-20) Is Daniel actually afraid to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Why? Why are we afraid to say the hard things that must be said to help our brothers and sisters? What can we do about it?

Q2. (Daniel 4:23-26) What does it mean to "acknowledge that Heaven rules"? In what ways is this hard for a king? In what ways is this hard for us? How do we sometimes deny by our actions that God is in charge of all?

Since our God is a merciful God, his decrees are sometimes conditional upon our response (for example, 1 Kings 21:29; Joel 2:14; Zephaniah 2:2-3).

Q3. (Daniel 4:27) What must Nebuchadnezzar do to demonstrate that he renounces and repents of his sins? What must you do to demonstrate that you repent of your sins? For us, what does it mean to be kind to the poor? That was certainly within Nebuchadnezzar's ability to accomplish. Is it within your ability? In what way can God's decrees be conditional?

The Dream's Fulfillment (4:28-33; 5:18-21)

Combining 4:28-33 with 5:18-21, we get a picture of Nebuchadnezzar's pride.

- Pride in his achievements - the self-made man complex (4:30).
- Pride in his terrible power, that everyone feared him, and didn't dare to challenge him (5:19a).
- Pride in his absolute authority to condemn, execute, promote, and humble at his own whim (5:19b).
- Pride that hardens his heart (5:20a). Pride distorts our perception of reality. See Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 1 John 2:16.

Q4. (Daniel 4:30; 5:18-21) How does pride show itself in Nebuchadnezzar's life? In what ways does it show up in your life? Pride is tricky. How can pride mask itself with humility?

Nebuchadnezzar learns about God that He is:

1. God is eternal (4:34a).
2. God's kingdom never ends (4:34b)
3. God cannot be compared with human beings (4:35a).
4. God is sovereign (5:19; 4:35b).
5. God is the "King of heaven" (4:37), not just a god among gods, he is the God of gods.
6. God is accountable to none (4:35c; Job 40:2-5)

Q5. (Daniel 4:34-35) What does Nebuchadnezzar's confession tell us about God? Have you ever given a public testimony of what you have learned about God through your trials? What might your testimony sound like?

B. The Handwriting on the Wall (Daniel 5)

If the incident of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness took place half-way through his reign, then we must move forward 45 to 50 years until the close of the reign of Nabonidus (556-539 BC), last king of the Neo-Babylonian empire. Since Nabonidus was away from the capital for much of his reign, from about 553 to 539 BC his son Belshazzar reigned in Babylon as co-regent, acting as supreme king, except perhaps in a few areas. By this time, Daniel is an old man, perhaps 80 years old. In 539 BC, Cyrus the Great invaded Babylonia.

In June, the city of Opis (Baghdad) fell, and within days Sippar surrendered. King Nabonidus fled to Babylon and went into hiding. Medo-Persian troops were moving toward the capital at Babylon. Yet Belshazzar, who is charged with the defense of Babylon, is throwing a party for a thousand of his friends in his palace.

Q6. (Daniel 5:22-24) In the New Testament, Jesus doesn't present God as legalistic, but as holy - "hallowed be thy name." We are to be God-fearers. How do Christians commonly act irreverently in ways that would offend God? How have you changed your ways to conform to God's holiness?

Lessons for Disciples:

We can learn a number of lessons from Daniel 4 and 5.

1. We must live our lives with the constant knowledge that God rules, not we (4:23-26).
2. Repentance for sin needs to be demonstrable, not with just our lips (4:27).
3. Disciples are to be kind to the poor (4:27).
4. Pride in our achievements can easily blind us to God's enabling power (4:30; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 1 John 2:16).
5. Pride can harden our heart towards God and others, and distort our perception of reality (5:20a).
6. From Nebuchadnezzar's confession we learn that God is eternal (4:34a), his kingdom never ends (4:34b). He is incomparable (4:35a), sovereign (4:35b), the King of Heaven (4:37), and accountable to none (4:35c).
7. We must be careful not to be irreverent in our speech and our actions, and how we act towards those things we have dedicated to God (5:22-24).
8. God's judgment may be delayed with time for repentance (4:29), or it may fall immediately without further warning (5:30). We are wise to repent quickly.