

# Lessons From The Life of Nebuchadnezzar

## Daniel 4

For over two decades a defiant, cocky man by the name of Napoleon created turmoil in Europe. Despite his small stature, 5 feet 2 inches, he caused great trouble for all the people around him. In a bid to regain some of the power he had lost due to a forced exile, Napoleon led his armies in a swath of devastation across the battlefields of Europe. On June 18, 1815, Napoleon and his armies faced the allied armies of England, Prussia, Russia, Austria, Belgium and The Netherlands, led by the Duke of Wellington.

Before the battle commenced Napoleon, speaking to of his commanding officer, said "We will put the infantry here, the calvary over there, and the artillery in that spot. At the end of the day, England will be at the feet of France, and Wellington will be the prisoner of Napoleon."

The officer responded, "But, we must not forget that man proposes and God disposes." With his typical arrogance, Napoleon stood as straight and as tall as his 5-foot-two-inch frame would allow and replied, "I want you to understand, sir, that Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes!"

Victor Hugo, the writer, penned these words concerning that battle, "From that moment Waterloo was lost, for God sent rain and hail so that the troops of Napoleon could not maneuver as he had planned, and on the night of the battle it was Napoleon who was prisoner of Wellington, and France who was at the feet of England."

Pride is a ruthless taskmaster! It will convince us that we have all the answers and that we know better than even God. The passage we read today gives us the testimony of a man who has learned a harsh lesson about the sin and pride that was in his own heart. In these verses, and in several others that precede them, we are given the details of Nebuchadnezzar's journey from sin to salvation. We will learn how the most powerful man in that day was made the prisoner of God and how the nation of Babylon was placed at the feet of Heaven. We will see how God works in the lives of people to get them where He wants them to be.

This is one of the most exciting of all the chapters in the book of Daniel. It records the stunning personal testimony of how God changed Nebuchadnezzar into a true believer. Daniel is telling Nebuchadnezzar's salvation story. I hope you have a salvation story. I hope you have something to tell about what God has done in your life.

It is the story of a human soul in the hand of God. It shows us how God works directly in the life of this man and brings him out of paganism into salvation. It is a reminder that God can save the mighty as well as the lowly. It is a reminder to us of the saving power of our God. No one is beyond the reach and the hope of the power of God.

The chapter begins by saying, "*Peace be multiplied unto you.*" Daniel 4:1 It reminds us of a New Testament epistle, as if you were picking up one of the letters of Paul as he says, "*Peace be multiplied unto you.*"

We are going to enter the classroom and learn some things from the life of Nebuchadnezzar. We're going to step back into his story. We don't want to learn this one on a field trip. We don't want to take this trip.

Paul says of the Old Testament, "*Now these things are written as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.*" 1 Corinthians 10:6

You can learn from watching someone else's mistakes, or you can learn by experiencing it yourself, and that is the most painful way to learn. It is possible to let someone else lay out the life lesson. Ever heard the phrase "stupid hurts" You don't have to be stupid. You can learn from someone else's stupid. Since stupid hurts, it is best to learn from someone else.

Nebuchadnezzar very painfully had to come to the realization that he was not God.

- The Greatness And Power Of God Is Unimaginable.

*“It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.”*  
Daniel 4:2

When he thinks about the God of this universe, it is an overwhelming experience. God is a great, marvelous, and wonderful God.

- The Goodness Of God Is Overwhelming.

*“How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.”* Daniel 4:3

Nebuchadnezzar is testifying to the greatness of the ways and the works of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul said, *“The depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.”* Romans 11:33

Nebuchadnezzar is humbled when he thinks about what God has done in his life. His testimony revolves around a rather remarkable dream which God gave to him. This is the second dream that Nebuchadnezzar has had. In the second chapter of Daniel, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream of a great image and the head was a head of gold. It was revealed to the king through Daniel that he was that head of gold.

In the third chapter, Nebuchadnezzar says, *“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”* Daniel 3:28 God has been warning him. God has been revealing Himself to Nebuchadnezzar. God has been getting His message to him. To this point, Nebuchadnezzar has not responded to God with his whole heart. God had been revealing Himself to him, and Nebuchadnezzar has been ignoring God.

- I Am Not Sovereign, Only God Rules.

*“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.”* Daniel 4:4-5

When Nebuchadnezzar says, *“I was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.”* It means he was enjoying a time of great peace and prosperity in his kingdom. You may think you have everything you need, but if you do not have Jesus, you are missing something significant. Do everything you want to try to keep God out of your life. God can get your attention. God has unusual means to do that. Sometimes God can send a storm. At other times, God may send a hurricane and bring fear to your heart. Sometimes God puts a dream into your heart. There is a message from heaven for Nebuchadnezzar’s heart. He thinks there is no way that anyone can get to him, but God has a way of getting to you. There is no one who is beyond the ability of God to reach. Nebuchadnezzar thinks he is absolutely safe. He thinks his life is fortified. When he has the dream, he did what he normally did.

*“The images and visions in my head troubled me.” “So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.”* Daniel 4:6

He calls for all of the experts, all of the authorities, all of the wise men of Babylon. He had already tried to get help from them before in Daniel 2, and they didn’t have any answers. But he is just like us. We just keep going on back to the same things that do not help. We keep looking to the wrong places to solve the problems, the difficulties, and the perplexities of our lives. God has been working in the life of Nebuchadnezzar already. Maybe God has been working in your life as well. In chapter 2, when the Lord gave the revelation of this dream to him, we are told that Nebuchadnezzar said to Daniel, *“Surely your God, Daniel, is the God of gods and the Lord of Kings, and a revealer of mysteries.”* Daniel 2:47

In his dream he was flourishing like a tree. He was prosperous and living in a very beautiful palace. The battles had all been fought. His building projects had all been completed. Babylon was a magnificent, prosperous city that was heavily fortified. He had an extremely large and strong army. He felt as if he were secure from outside invasion.

*“When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) I said, ‘Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.’ This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” Daniel 4:7-18*

*“Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.’ Belteshazzar answered, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’ This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.” Daniel 4:19-26*

When you realize that heaven rules, you are in a place for God to bless your life.

*“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Daniel 4:27*

*“All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for my glory and my majesty?’” Daniel 4:28-30*

Notice the repetition of “I” and “my.” It is in the emphatic form in Arabic. It means “*I myself*” He got great advice, and 12 months later, he is not a changed man. He lived for 7 long years as an animal until he acknowledged that heaven rules, and many of us are still having great difficulty with that. God knows how to draw the lines.

- My Stuff Is Temporary, God Is Eternal.

Most of what we hold to as valuable is temporary. We live in such fast times that we need to be reminded that we live brief lives that it will all be gone someday.

*“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.” Daniel 4:4*

He has a record of achievement virtually without parallel in human history. Babylon is the center of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire. It required 126 pages just to chronicle the inscriptions that were put on all the buildings he constructed. He has conquered the known world and then, with only human labor—no machinery, constructed the world’s most renowned city. You’ve heard of the seven wonders of the ancient world, maybe the most remarkable of them is said to have been the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. That was Nebuchadnezzar. He built those, the story goes, for his wife who was homesick for the mountainous area where she grew up. So he had constructed one of the seven wonders of the ancient world...the Hanging Gardens of Babylon which he built as a birthday present for his wife.

From his palace, he could see a double wall that ran all the way around Babylon. He could walk along the top of the wall and see the golden palace he built, He could see the walls 387 feet high and 85 feet thick, and they could race four chariots wide around them. The city was a perfect square, 20 miles each way. It had wide streets, buildings, and 1.2 million people, and was protected by a deep mote that was filled with water. The mighty Euphrates River flowed in one side and out the other. The city was filled with palm groves, gardens, and orchards. So much food was grown there that, if they were attacked, they could survive inside for 20 years. There was simply no city like it in the world.

The Greek historian Herodotus wrote, “In addition to its size, Babylon surpasses in splendor any city in the known world, and Nebuchadnezzar built it.” It was his city. It would not be there if it were not for him. Nebuchadnezzar’s worldview was: “That’s the world right there, and it’s just revolving around me.”

Nebuchadnezzar became filled with pride, *“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and the glory of my majesty.” Daniel 4:30* And God responded, *“I have had enough of Nebuchadnezzar.”* The next time you see him, he is crawling around in the grass, hair unkempt, finger nails long, a wolf man humbled by God.

Did Nebuchadnezzar think he had a problem? No. *“I was prosperous and content.”* God thought he had a problem. In our day, that’s kind of the good life people search for. Most seminars, classes that are attended, books that are sold are to get you there—to be content and prosperous. He had no idea of his spiritual peril. One of the great dangers in sin and self-sufficiency is that we can carry with us a kind of blindness to ourselves. Other people see it, but we don’t.

- My Success Is Temporary, God Is Sovereign.

*“Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, ‘This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.’” Daniel 4:31*

He thought his greatness was going to last forever. Greatness in this world is temporary. Only God’s greatness is eternal. In the middle of whatever moment of success you have, if you do not remember that it is temporary, then you will mishandle it. You will know moments and seasons of greatness in your life, but it will all be temporary.

God rules in the kingdom of men. The king of Babylon was no match for the King of the universe, and neither are we. God rules, and God is in charge.

- My Arrogance Can Force The Hand Of God To Oppose Me.

*“You will be driven away from people.” Daniel 4:31*

Nebuchadnezzar needed to arrest his arrogance. He thought more of himself than he was. He possessed inflated ideas of his own importance. There are many different catalogs of sins in the Bible, but pride finds its way to the top of every one of those lists. Proverbs tells us there are six things God hates, and a proud look, or pride, is at the top of that list.

*“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6* Pride is the only sin that invites God’s judgement. It turns off the power in a person’s life more than anything else.

There were things he was taking credit for that only God should get credit for. He had to get clear about this in his soul. Until he was free from his boasting, God was unable to bless his life. His pride had forced God's hand to oppose him. His arrogance had required God's opposition. Because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. You don't have to live like an animal in your home and marriage.

If God blesses arrogance, we begin to think it is all about us. How kind of God to interrupt our lives! We can see arrogance in other people, but we have a hard time seeing it in ourselves. Every act of disobedience is a personal act of arrogance. What we are really saying is, "God, my way is better than Your way." Every time we dismiss the wisdom of God, it is an act of arrogance. When we handle our money our way, handle our marriage our way, solve a problem our way, when we meet a need in our own way, we are asking God to oppose us.

- Living Off Your Impulses Turns You Into An Animal.

*"You will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.*" Daniel 4:31-32

Sin will turn you into an animal. Sin will make you act like an animal. Sin Will Always Bring You Down.

God has done so much for him that he just has to tell somebody about it. God has done a miracle for him. Nebuchadnezzar screams to us, "I have been down that road, and it hurts!" When we walk away from God and His wisdom and His favor, it is just a matter of time until we are ruled by our instincts and the base parts of us start deciding the path we will choose. Instead of acting like an animal, you should humble yourself.

*"He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."* Daniel 4:33

Many of us are going through things, even living like animals, because we will not admit that God is sovereign. He no longer ruled Babylon, now Babylon was ruling him. We live in a culture that wants to get inside of us and control us. We never deal with our stuff. There are some things that we need to leave behind.

"Edith, a mother of eight, was coming home from the neighbor's house one Saturday afternoon. Things seemed too quiet as she walked across her front yard. Curious, she peered through the screen door and saw five of her youngest children huddled together, concentrating on something. As she crept closer to them, trying to discover the center of their attention, she could not believe her eyes. In the middle of the circle were five baby skunks. Edith screamed at the top of her voice, 'Quick, children, run!' Each kid grabbed a skunk and ran." That's the human condition. We grab a skunk and run. We take them with us.

The very habits and patterns and pride that destroys us...my greed, my pride, my superiority, my contempt, my so easily passing judgment on somebody else, sexual immorality, vanity, passivity, apathy, selfishness, deceit, gluttony, hypocrisy. Those things get down inside us so deeply that we just carry them with us. We're so used to them, we don't think they're there. Every once in a while, maybe something happens. Maybe a spotlight...we get caught in something. It's so interesting. When we do, you'll see this with public figures sometimes, almost always the response is, when somebody gets caught doing something, "Well, that's not me." But of course it *is* me. It's all in me. We get pretty good at hiding it or disguising our own weaknesses.

- Only When We Surrender Our Lives To God Can He Bless Us.

*"Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."* Daniel 4:27

God wants to use reason with Nebuchadnezzar. It's what God will do with us. Daniel is bringing all this to the light in Nebuchadnezzar. God is not subtle or obscure about this. For one year, he gets the opportunity to repent. God waits

12 months. Every day Nebuchadnezzar wakes up and chooses to push the dream and its message out of his mind. I won't think about it today. Every day he says, maybe not consciously, "I will not bend my knee to this God. I will live just as I please. I will not show kindness to the poor...not today. My city. My palace. My gardens." Maybe he thinks God is bluffing. Maybe he thinks he is clever enough to outsmart God. Maybe he thinks, the dream was just a dream and there is no God there at all. Maybe he tells himself that one day he will pay attention and give God his obedience. But not today. Maybe he just works hard not to think about it, not to think about the dream, and avoids Daniel.

One year later, the seed God sowed in him is so dead that Nebuchadnezzar has become a slave to all the arrogance God warned him against. God had tried to reason with him. Isaiah put it like this, "*Come, let us reason together.*" Isaiah 1:18

"*It may be.*" It depends on if Nebuchadnezzar is willing to listen. Is he willing to humble himself? Is he willing to renounce his sin? Is he willing to bend the knee? It may be. Of course, we're breathless at that moment. What does Nebuchadnezzar say? Daniel just says this amazing thing to his face. Does he yell at him? Does he dismiss him? Does he weep? Does he confess? We don't know.

For one solid year, he has had an opportunity to repent. Why did God wait a year? Because the Bible says, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" 2 Peter 3:9

God is long-suffering. It's because God has been merciful to you, and God is giving you space to repent. That's why the Bible says, "*Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation.*" 2 Corinthians 6:2

For 120 years Noah preached righteousness to his Godless generation. It is the patience of God that you're alive. God has given him one solid year to repent. After a year, that dream had probably worn off. I guess it was in the back of his head—still thinking about it, but it's not quite as powerful as it was when he first heard it.

- God Is Great, And I Am Not.

*"At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'"* Daniel 4:34-35

He had to hit the bottom to learn it. You don't have to. I hope you don't wait. We will all get there at death at one day, if not sooner. The turning point for Nebuchadnezzar when he realizes this comes where he says, "*I raised my eyes toward heaven.*" Daniel 4:37

*God uses for His glory those people and things which are the most perfectly broken. They are the sacrifices in which He delights.*

*It was through the breaking down of Jacob's natural strength at Peniel that he was brought to the place where God could clothe him with spiritual power.*

*It was the breaking of the surface of the rock at Horeb by the striking of Moses' rod that let the cool water flow out to the thirsty people of Israel. It was when the 300 elect soldiers under Gideon broke their pitchers (a type of breaking themselves) that the hidden light shone forth to the consternation of their adversaries.*

*It was when the poor widow broke the seal of the little pot of oil and poured it forth that God multiplied it to pay all her debts and to supply a means of her support.*

*It was when Jesus took the five loaves and broke them that the bread was multiplied-- sufficient to feed 5000 men.*

*It was when Mary broke her beautiful alabaster box of ointment that the pent-up perfume filled the house.*

*It was when Jesus allowed His precious body to be broken by the thorns, the nails, and a spear, redemption poured forth like a crystal stream from which sinners could drink and live.*

*Yes, the Lord blesses broken things!"*

He is not saying physically he looked up in the sky. He is saying, "Finally, I turned my heart, my allegiance to the One I had been running from my whole life. I asked God to do what I could not do to forgive my sins, to give me a clean slate, to create in me a new heart. I raised my eyes toward heaven." That's all God is waiting for, because God always responds to a repentant heart. You know, to not do that, to keep going on the path Nebuchadnezzar had been on, to live in pride is so much self-deception. Eventually, reality will crush it.

- God's Heart Is Full Of Love.

*"At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before."* Daniel 4:36-37

Nebuchadnezzar finally gets to that place. He lifted his eyes toward heaven. God's heart is always a heart of grace. God is always ready to forgive. God always wants to love. That's Nebuchadnezzar's story, but now the question is...what's your story? Nobody makes things right between themselves and God by being on the performance plan. You can't be that good. It's not by just giving a little more money or going to church or being more respectable.

God will never lower His standard, so He decided to lower Himself. He sent His Son Jesus, the Carpenter who humbled Himself and became obedient to death on a Cross. On that Cross, Jesus was expressing both God's anger, God's refusal to accept sin, the ugliness of it, and God's willingness to suffer because of His love for you and me. On that Cross, Jesus was bearing the sin of the world, of Nebuchadnezzar, and you and me. He died there, the death that by all rights I should die. We can be forgiven. Anybody can be in a right relationship with God based not on how we perform but on what Jesus has done.

My generation feels like it is all on us. We work like everything is on us. We can't rest and take a day off. The sovereignty of God says, "It does not depend upon you." Nebuchadnezzar was gone for 7 years, and it went just fine.

The 18-25 year old group believes that you cannot make a difference in this world and since I can't, I just watch the game from the sidelines. You won't be perfect, and you may fail. That's normal. So you need to risk it, and God will give you direction. God cannot steer a parked car, so get it in gear, and He will lead you. When you risk it, you can change your world, so step up to the plate.

After his conversion and restoration, his kingdom was greater than ever before.

Our struggle today is with two extremes. We struggle with both arrogance and anxiety. That is when we think too little of God.

*"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."* Daniel 4:37

Is my arrogance pushing the sovereign God to humble me?

Is my anxiety robbing me of the joy and peace in life?

Is God free to bless my life?