

Where Your High Horse Will Take You: From Brazen to Grazin' A Study of Daniel 4

Characteristic of Completeness: Humility

Big Idea: God alone is on the throne; don't take His seat.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 18:27; 145:13; Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:18; 29:23;
Isaiah 13:11; 29:16; 40:1-31; 45:9; Matthew 11:29; 18:4; 23:12; Romans 9:14-23; 12:3, 16;
1 Corinthians 10:12; Philippians 2:3-8; James 4:6

Introduction:

- A. On the short list of things God says He hates, this one thing is at the top of the list.¹ In fact, the Bible describes this one thing as an abomination to God. Scripture tells us that this one thing lies at the root of Satan's rebellion against God.²

Yet strangely, this one thing is the one problem hardest to detect by those it victimizes. One author says that this problem is "a sin of whose presence its victim is least conscious."³ Another describes it as "the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the person who has it."⁴

This one thing is pride. Not wholesome pride, like taking pride in your school or taking pride in your work. This is arrogant pride—pride that is self-focused, self-absorbed, self-conceited, self-enthroning.

- B. The opposite of pride is humility. The Bible tells us that God is on the side of the humble and lowly, and He gives them grace.⁵ We are told that the greatest of all are those who are humble.⁶ This most important person in history, Jesus Christ, is described as humble.⁷ And, the most important event in history, the surrender of Christ to crucifixion, is described as an act of humility.⁸ Indeed, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is humility.
- C. In light of the importance of pride and humility, it would be good to know exactly what they look like in real life so that we can know what to avoid and what to follow. Instead of speaking in the abstract, it would be good to see a personal example of how pride and humility are lived out.

¹ Proverbs 6:16-17.

² Ezekiel 28:17.

³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, quoted by Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 468.

⁴ Buddy Robinson, quoted by Swindoll, 465.

⁵ James 4:6.

⁶ Matthew 18:4.

⁷ Matthew 11:29.

⁸ Philippians 2:8.

In our study of the book of Daniel, we come today to Chapter 4, which presents in one man an example of first pride, then humility. In the span of single chapter, we get a glimpse of great pride and then great humility in the very same person, proving that there's hope for all of us. The person in whom we see pride and humility is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of ancient Babylonia.

Chapter 4 represents a public decree authorized by king Nebuchadnezzar—a decree that looked back on things that happened to him over a period of some eight years. This chapter is unusual in that it is written entirely from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel merely recorded what Nebuchadnezzar had decreed. The decree was addressed to everyone, and opens with these words in Verse 1:

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:1** Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and *men of every language* that live in all the earth: . . .

This was probably written 30 years or more after Daniel had been deported to Babylon.⁹ As such, Daniel was probably between 45 and 50 years old at the time.¹⁰

D. Nebuchadnezzar's decree continues:

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:1** . . . “May your peace abound! ² It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation.”

In this introduction to the decree, we see that Nebuchadnezzar humbly acknowledges the sovereignty of the one true God of Israel. He has been humbled.

I. Then, in the main part of the decree, he recounts a time when he was not so humble. In this autobiographical sketch, we see some distinguishing marks of pride.

A. In Verse 4, he begins his story,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:4** “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.”

► Pride often thrives in the midst of comfort and prosperity. When things seem to be going well, it's easy for me to begin to think that I'm calling the shots, that I'm in

⁹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Daniel,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 60; Gene A. Getz, *Daniel: Standing Firm for God, Men of Character Series*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 75; J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1341; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1973), 99.

¹⁰ Getz, 75-80; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel, The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, ed., vol. 18, (Memphis, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 128; Pentecost, 1341; Wood, 99.

charge, that I'm self sufficient, that I don't need anybody, that I rule, that somehow I'm prospering because I'm so wonderful. The relative comfort and prosperity that we enjoy in America is rich soil for the weed of pride to grow.

- B. Another characteristic of ► pride is that it doesn't learn from what God has done in the past. Pride forgets God.

Let's see how this was reflected in Nebuchadnezzar.

1. Beginning in Verse 5, he says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:5** "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and *these* fantasies *as I lay* on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ⁶ So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me."¹¹

Does this scenario sound familiar to you? You may recall that, back in Chapter 2, Daniel also had an alarming dream before this one. Remember that previous dream was about a human-like figure made of various materials that was eventually smashed. Back then, Nebuchadnezzar also gave orders for all his wise men to interpret the dream, but they could not. But then young Daniel, through the divine enablement of the God of Israel, was able to describe and interpret the dream. In fact, remember what Nebuchadnezzar had said to Daniel back in Chapter 2, Verse 47. He said,

^{NAU} **Daniel 2:47** . . . "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

All that had happened 25-30 years earlier.¹² Nebuchadnezzar's failure to summon Daniel right away in this more recent case shows that he hadn't learned from what God had done in the past.

2. You may be thinking, "Well, maybe the king just forgot about Daniel and his God." Not so. The king hadn't forgotten what Daniel had done earlier; but he apparently didn't learn from it. Picking up in Verse 8, we see that Daniel

¹¹ The magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners probably knew the general idea of the dream, but chose not to give an interpretation (Archer, 62; Wood, 104). In Verse 7, "could not" is better rendered "did not" (Getz, 76; Wood, 104). Perhaps they refused to interpret the dream because it so clearly incriminated the king and threatened their own jobs.

¹² C.F. Keil, *Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 9, three volumes in one, translated by M.G. Easton, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, reprinted 1975), 146.

finally arrives later,¹³ and Nebuchadnezzar definitely remembers him. He says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:8** “But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, *saying*,⁹ ‘O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell *me* the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.’”

Nebuchadnezzar remembered what Daniel and his God had done before, but he didn't learn from it. Pride doesn't learn from what God has done in the past.

3. Then Nebuchadnezzar relays his dream to Daniel, beginning in Verse 10. It's a dream about a tree that was cut down, the stump of which became a man who behaved like an animal.

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:10** “Now *these were* the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, *there was* a tree in the midst of the earth and its height *was* great.¹¹ The tree grew large and became strong And its height reached to the sky, And it *was* visible to the end of the whole earth.¹² Its foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, And in it *was* food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, And the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, And all living creatures fed themselves from it.¹³ I was looking in the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed, and behold, an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven.¹⁴ He shouted out and spoke as follows: “Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the beasts flee from under it And the birds from its branches.¹⁵ Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze *around it* In the new grass of the field; And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth.¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from *that of* a man And let a beast's mind be given to him, And let seven periods of time pass over him.¹⁷ This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones . . .”

Now here's the purpose of all this, according to the angel in his dream. It is . . .

¹³ Perhaps Daniel was late in arriving by his own choosing to reveal the inability of the other wise men to interpret the dream (Wood, 105).

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:17** ““ . . . In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men.””

The “Most High” is the God of Israel, the God of the Bible. Was Nebuchadnezzar completely unaware of the “Most High” God? No. He knew about this Most High God, but he didn’t learn from it. He didn’t surrender himself to the Most High. He didn’t worship or obey Him.

You may recall what happened back in Chapter 3. Remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were miraculously spared from being harmed in the midst of the fiery furnace. This had happened at least 10-15 years earlier.¹⁴ Listen to what Nebuchadnezzar said back then in Daniel 3:26

^{NAU} **Daniel 3:26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” . . . [emphasis mine]

You see, Nebuchadnezzar knew about the Most High. But he didn’t learn from it. He didn’t take it to heart. He had all the religious “god” talk down pat. But his heart wasn’t in it.

4. In Daniel 4:18, Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to interpret the dream. In Verses 19-26, Daniel gives the interpretation. He explains that the enormous tree represents Nebuchadnezzar. The tree is chopped down to show that Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty will be removed from him. And he will become like the cattle grazing the fields. According to Verses 25 and 26, all this will be done to show . . .

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:25** . . . that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.²⁶ . . . that *it is* Heaven *that* rules.

- C. After Daniel interpreted the dream, he offers Nebuchadnezzar a little friendly advice. He suggests that Nebuchadnezzar change his ways. In Verse 27, he says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:27** ““Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.””

¹⁴ Keil, 146; Miller, 128; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: Determining to Go God’s Direction*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2000), 49.

This is an invitation to pursue the agenda of the Most High, to surrender to His authority, to follow His commands. But ► pride doesn't listen to advice. Pride is not open to correction. Nebuchadnezzar was too preoccupied with himself and his own kingdom. He ignored the advice.

D. Twelve months passed and nothing happened. Verses 28-30 record,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:28** “All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.²⁹ “Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof* of the royal palace of Babylon.³⁰ “The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

► Pride exalts the sovereign self, not the Most High God. The unholy trinity of pride is me, myself, and I.

Nebuchadnezzar's works had been impressive.

1. He is credited with building the celebrated Ishtar gate.¹⁵ On ► the screen is a picture of a modern reproduction of the Ishtar gate leading into ancient Babylon.
2. He built or refurbished some 20 temples in and around Babylon.¹⁶
3. He built a vast system of fortifications and shipping docks.¹⁷ Babylon was surrounded by a water-filled moat and incredible double walls some forty feet high, seventeen miles long, and wide enough for chariots to ride on top of them.¹⁸
4. One ancient inscription credited to Nebuchadnezzar reads: “The fortifications of Esaglia [the temple of Marduk] and Babylon I strengthened, and established the name of my reign forever.”¹⁹ Most of the bricks unearthed at Babylon by modern archaeologists bear the stamp of Nebuchadnezzar.²⁰
5. Nebuchadnezzar had three palaces in Babylon, one of which was 350 yards long and 200 yards wide.²¹

¹⁵ Archer, 65; Wood, 119.

¹⁶ Archer, 65.

¹⁷ Archer, 65.

¹⁸ Miller, 140-141; Wood, 119.

¹⁹ George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1916), 479, quoted by Archer, 65.

²⁰ Miller, 141.

²¹ Miller, 141.

6. As a gift to his wife, Nebuchadnezzar built the famous hanging gardens, considered by ancient Greeks to be one of the seven wonders of the world.²² On ► the screen is an artist's rendering of what the hanging gardens looked like.
7. During his reign, Babylon became the most magnificent and probably the largest city on earth.²³

Nebuchadnezzar was a busy man. Busy glorifying himself. Busy making his life comfortable. Busy making himself secure. Busy impressing other people.

- E. This ► last week, as I studied this text, I tried to disassociate myself from Nebuchadnezzar. I thought to myself that he is such an extreme case that it's hard to relate. I'm not a king. I don't have a palace. I have a lawn, but no hanging gardens.

Then I started asking myself some questions. Am I so comfortable and at ease that pride is taking root? Am I really learning from what God has done in the past in a way that changes my mind and my behavior? Am I listening to advice? Am I exalting myself instead of God?

And then I began to ask God to show me how I might be prideful. God didn't speak to me in an audible voice, but some unsettling questions occurred to me. It was as if God were asking me some probing questions.

"Bob, when you are too busy to pray and seek My face, is that because you think your agenda is more important than Mine?"

"Bob, when you are too busy to do the work of applying My Word to your life, is that because you think your agenda is more important than Mine?"

"Bob, when you are so busy trying to perform at the highest level, is that because you are more concerned with your reputation than Mine?"

"Bob, who is really on the throne?"

"Just asking."

- II. Nebuchadnezzar had just finished congratulating himself on the accomplishment of his agenda and the glory of his own reputation, when Verse 31 picks up the story:

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:31** "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from

²² Miller, 141; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 108; Wood, 119-120.

²³ Miller, 140.

you,³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.”²⁴

The “seven periods of time” was probably seven years.²⁵ Verse 33 continues,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:33** “Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.”

Nebuchadnezzar went from brazen to grazin’. That’s where pride will take you. From *jefe* to heifer. From divine to bovine.²⁶ Pride will bring you low. Which brings me to the ► big idea of my message: God alone is on the throne; don’t take His seat.

III. Seven years of humiliation pass before Nebuchadnezzar begins to show the marks of humility.

A. In Verse 34, he says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:34** “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me . . .”

It’s not often that you see cattle raising their eyes toward heaven. They’re too preoccupied with themselves and what’s right in front of their noses. But ► humility takes its eyes off itself. Humility looks instead to the Most High.

B. Humility focuses not on the greatness of self, ► but on the greatness of God. In Verse 34, Nebuchadnezzar continues,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:34** “. . . 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.”

C. Also, humility ► clearly sees the gap between God and us. Humility knows who’s on the throne. The humble person puts himself in perspective, and he knows where the power comes from. In Verse 35, the king says,

²⁴ The change to consistent use of the third person (in Verse 28) seems to be a literary device to reflect the king’s loss of control (Lucas, 104).

²⁵ Archer, 61; Miller, 134-135; Wood, 111.

²⁶ There are conditions or diseases (lycanthropy, boanthropy, zoanthropy) known to cause humans to act like animals. The diseases are curable and known to allow the victim sufficient consciousness of self to make intelligent prayer possible (Wood, 121).

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:35** “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

- D. And ► humility admits personal weakness and failure. Remember this entire chapter is a public decree issued by the king. If I were the king and if I were issuing the decree I’d be willing to go with the honor-the-Most-High part, but I would have been sorely tempted to leave out the I-became-a-cow part.
- E. And finally, ► humility pursues God’s agenda, not its own. Remember Daniel’s suggestion back in Verse 27:

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:27** “. . . break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor . . .”

Nebuchadnezzar had been a busy man. Busy glorifying himself. Busy making his life comfortable. Busy making himself secure. Busy impressing other people. Busy with his own agenda. But no longer.

IV. The results of humility are good.

- A. In due time, the humble will be exalted. In Verse 36, Nebuchadnezzar says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:36** “At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.”

Some scholars believe that Nebuchadnezzar experienced true conversion and that we’ll therefore see him in heaven, but we can’t be sure of this.²⁷

- B. What we can be sure of is that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom for Nebuchadnezzar. In Verse 37 he says,

^{NAU} **Daniel 4:37** “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”²⁸

God ► alone is on the throne; don’t take His seat.

²⁷ Miller, 144; Walvoord, 95, 111-112; Wood, 100, 126-128.

²⁸ It is interesting that previously Nebuchadnezzar tried to manipulate or coerce worship (3:4, 29). Now he simply shares his testimony (Lucas, 114).

“He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” Do you walk in pride? Is God trying to ask you some probing questions? Are you listening to His voice? Is He asking you the same questions He’s asking me?

“When you are too busy to pray and seek My face, is that because you think your agenda is more important than Mine?”

“When you are too busy to do the work of applying My Word to your life, is that because you think your agenda is more important than Mine?”

“When you are so busy trying to perform at the highest level, is that because you are more concerned with your reputation than Mine?”

“Who is really on the throne?”

“Just asking.”