

God Opposes the Proud

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Life in Babylon / Pride; Humility / Daniel 4:1-37

In Daniel 4:1-37, we see a living illustration of the Biblical truth that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Introduction

According to the Bible, the root problem at the very core of all of our lives is pride.

Now I know that's nothing new.

This problem first surfaced in the Garden of Eden.

The problem with pride is that it robs us not only of a full and meaningful relationship with other people but, even more so, it robs us of a full and meaningful relationship with God.

Throughout Scripture, we find the same theme repeatedly: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (cf. [James 4:6](#)).

But I'm afraid that most of us today are unaware of our problem with pride.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, "If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud."

Let me share a working definition of pride with you: Pride is simply our refusal to acknowledge God as we should. It is failing to realize fully that all of our abilities, achievements, possessions, and relationships are not due ultimately to our sound judgment or superior wisdom, but to the gifts and grace of a sovereign God.

God has declared himself in Scripture as the active antagonist of the proud. God is adamantly opposed to those who set themselves up in proud self-sufficiency.

In [Daniel 4](#), we find an incredible story about the extent to which God will go to humble those who walk in pride.

The key verse for this narrative is verse 37, where we find the final words, **“And those who walk in pride he [that is, God] is able to humble.”**

The first three verses of [Daniel 4](#) are the end of the story. Before this, King Nebuchadnezzar had always been supremely arrogant and proud.

So what happened to bring about such a radical change?

Let’s see the dramatic story of how God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar in [Daniel 4:4-37](#).

Scripture

Let us read [Daniel 4:1-37](#):

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

³ How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶ So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸ At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹ “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. ¹⁰ The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹

The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its leaves were 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 heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³ “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, 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.’ ¹⁸ This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, ²¹ whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— ²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. ²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a

band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,'²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. 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.²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ 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?” ³¹ While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

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;

³⁵ 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?”**

³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. 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.

Lesson

In [Daniel 4:1-37](#), we see a living illustration of the Biblical truth that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

I. God Opposes the Proud (4:4-33)

First, God opposes the proud.

In verses 4-5, we learn that one evening, while King Nebuchadnezzar was lounging comfortably in his luxurious palace, he fell asleep and had a terrifying dream.

Verses 6-7 tell us that he immediately commanded all his wise men to come before him to interpret this nightmare. But these men failed—again!—to give the meaning of his dream.

In verses 8-9, we see that the king turned again to Daniel for help.

With Daniel before him, the king then described his dream in verses 10-16.

Daniel’s interpretation of this dream was as simple as it was alarming. It wasn’t good news for the king. In verse 19, Daniel said, **“My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!”**

Daniel then went on in verses 20-25 to tell the king that he was that tree. That meant that he was going to have a great fall. His fall would be so hard that he would become psychotic to the point of becoming like some kind of animal living in the fields. That state would continue for seven time periods (probably seven years) until he finally humbled himself before God.

In verse 26, Daniel told the king the good news that when he did finally humble himself before God and acknowledge that only Heaven rules ultimately, then, and only then, would his kingdom be restored to him. That was why the stump with its roots remained in his dream. He would be brought down but not destroyed.

After Daniel finished interpreting the king's dream, verse 27 tells us that he then courageously exhorted the king to change his ways so that this harsh discipline from God might be avoided: **“Break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”**

Now we don't know exactly how the king responded to this challenge of Daniel's. The passage just does not tell us. But since verse 29 tells us that the events described in this dream did not begin to take place until twelve months later, Nebuchadnezzar may have at least made attempts to change his ways.

But whatever happened during those twelve months, the king did experience the fulfillment of his dream one year later. Verse 29-30 describes the scene for us: **“At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?’ ”**

Can you see the pride of the king?

Here we find a classic example of a man refusing to acknowledge his indebtedness to God. A man choosing to exalt himself. He's strutting on top of his palace like a male peacock in full array.

And then the bomb drops.

Notice in verses 31-33 that while the words were still on the lips of the king, God executed his judgment on the king.

Now, what are we meant to learn?

We are to learn the age-old lesson of [Proverbs 16:18](#), which says, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

It is summarized in [Daniel 4:37b](#), **“And those who walk in pride he [that is, God] is able to humble.”**

All who seek to exalt themselves will be brought down by God. Why?

Simply because there is only One who is worthy of the highest place, and that is Jesus Christ. All who exalt themselves above him will eventually be brought down.

Now, before we take this too far, I want to make it clear that this does not necessarily mean that being successful is wrong. Being promoted and being elevated to a place of prominence can come from God himself. [Psalm 75:7](#) says, “But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.”

It is the Lord’s sovereign right to demote as well as to promote—and most of the time we don’t know why God chooses to promote one person and demote another.

The Bible is full of examples of people whom God has raised from obscurity and exalted to great prosperity.

David was a young shepherd boy whom God made a king.

Job was a humble farmer when God prospered him with financial independence.

Amos was promoted from a fig picker to being one of the great prophets of God.

Daniel was lifted from a lowly peon in a boot camp in Babylon to become a national leader.

But the key to their success was that they never lost perspective in the process. All these men remembered who it was who raised them and who it was who could just as quickly bring them down again.

Now Nebuchadnezzar joins their ranks acknowledging that **“the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”** (4:17, 25, 32).

No matter what position you may now have, no matter what possessions you may now own, no matter what relationships you may now have, no matter what your present skills and abilities are, and no matter how secure you may now feel in these things, you must know that you are always in complete dependence on God.

It doesn't matter how secure you think you are, you are not in control.

God is the only one on the throne!

He is the one controlling all the events of this world and our lives according to his perfect plan for our good and his glory.

So, God opposes the proud.

II. God Gives Grace to the Humble (4:34-37)

But second, notice that God gives grace to the humble.

King Nebuchadnezzar had to lose it all. He had to be reduced to a wild beast for seven years before he could come to the end of himself and bow before a sovereign God.

But when he was finally humbled before God, his life was radically changed. It was as if a shaft of light broke into his darkened mind.

In verses 34-35, he described it by saying, **“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; 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?’ ”**

Once the king saw God in all his sovereignty and glory, his whole perspective changed. He now saw the earth as under God's absolute control. His pride vanished as he realized that God was the one calling the shots, not himself.

And just as God was adamantly opposed to the king's pride, so God was unequivocally committed to honoring the king's humility.

And so God poured out his blessings on him. Nebuchadnezzar concludes this passage by saying in verses 36-37a, **“At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just.”**

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Nebuchadnezzar had once been the proud king of Babylon but he was humbled by the hand of a sovereign and almighty God.

Conclusion

There are two applications from this passage for us.

A. God Will Go to Great Lengths to Show Us That He Is Lord

First, God will go to great lengths to show us that he is Lord.

He will not allow our pride to go unchecked. He loves us too much to do that.

He will even use intense pain or hardship if he must to remove ingratitude and proud self-sufficiency from our lives so that we will acknowledge our dependence on him.

It sometimes takes the brutal blows of affliction to soften and penetrate our hardened hearts.

You may be discouraged today because God’s crushing has still not yet led to your surrender—possibly after many years.

God is saying to you today, “Bow before me and surrender your pride. As confusing as it all may seem, let go of the reins now and simply trust in my sovereign rule of heaven and earth—and your life.”

B. God’s Purpose in Humbling Us Is Always for Our Good and His Glory

And second, God's purpose in humbling us is always for our good and his glory.

Never forget that in humbling us, God is performing a marvelous work of his love and grace.

By crushing us God is refining us and making us more and more like Jesus Christ.

Nebuchadnezzar was eternally thankful for his affliction because he saw how it took that seven-year affliction to humble his pride so that he might drink from the fountain of God's grace.

The Psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" ([Psalm 119:67, 71](#)).

There is no example of humility quite like Jesus Christ.

In [Philippians 2](#), Jesus Christ is set before us as the ultimate example of humility.

Paul tells us that Jesus "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" ([Philippians 2:8-9](#)).

God the Father responded to his Son's humility by exalting him above all things. The most broken and humble person who ever lived became the most exalted One.

Do you see in Jesus the strong link between humility and the pouring out of God's grace?

The apostle Peter did.

That's why he wrote, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" ([1 Peter 5b-7](#)). Amen.