

DANIEL 4 & 5

The Problem with Pride

Student Study Guide

1. God Is Still in Control

READ: Daniel 1:1–3

Daniel opens with Babylon besieging Jerusalem, but he immediately tells us that “the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand” (Daniel 1:2). Judah had repeatedly rebelled against God and rejected His warnings, so God used Babylon as an instrument of judgment (see 2 Chronicles 36:14–17; Jeremiah 25:3–11).

For Jewish exiles, this detail mattered: Babylon had not defeated their God. Even in judgment and exile, God had not lost control.

MAIN THEME: GOD RULES OVER EVERY KING AND KINGDOM.

2. Shinar, Babel, and the Problem Beneath Pride

READ: Genesis 11:1–4

Daniel 1:2 says the temple vessels were taken to “the land of Shinar.” Shinar is the region associated with Babel in Genesis 11. There humanity said, “Let us make a name for ourselves.”

THE ISSUE: Babel represents the human desire to build greatness, security, and significance apart from God.

At the heart of that desire is a lack of trust: trying to secure for ourselves what we do not trust God to provide.

The Biblical Contrast

- Genesis 12:2 — God tells Abraham, “I will ... make your name great.”
- 2 Samuel 7:9 — God tells David, “I will make for you a great name.”

PRIDE TRIES TO TAKE FOR ITSELF WHAT FAITH TRUSTS GOD TO GIVE.

The issue is not that greatness itself is evil. The issue is self-exaltation and self-reliance apart from God.

3. Daniel 4 — Nebuchadnezzar Is Humbled

READ: Daniel 4:4–36

Nebuchadnezzar had been given extraordinary power and greatness by God (Daniel 2:37–38), but he eventually looked over Babylon and credited himself: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built ... for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30).

- God warned Nebuchadnezzar through the dream.
- Daniel called him to turn from sin and practice righteousness and mercy (Daniel 4:27).
- Nebuchadnezzar continued in pride and was humbled.
- When he acknowledged the Most High, his reason and kingdom were restored.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S CONCLUSION: “Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” — Daniel 4:37

YOU CAN HUMBLE YOURSELF, OR YOU CAN BE HUMBLLED.

This does not mean humble people never experience humbling circumstances. It means Scripture calls us to humble ourselves before God and repeatedly warns that God is able to bring down the proud.

4. Daniel 5 — The Fall of Babylon

Daniel 4 and 5 are separated by more than twenty years. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, and Babylon fell in 539 BC. Daniel 5 deliberately looks back to Nebuchadnezzar's experience to contrast it with Belshazzar's response.

Belshazzar's Feast

READ: Daniel 5:1–9

Belshazzar holds a great feast and uses the vessels taken from the Jerusalem temple while praising idols. A mysterious hand then writes on the palace wall, and the king is terrified.

Who Was Belshazzar?

- Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC.
- He was followed by Amel-Marduk, Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk, and then Nabonidus.
- Nabonidus was the final king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (556–539 BC).
- Belshazzar was Nabonidus's son and exercised major royal authority in Babylon during his father's reign.

For a time, Belshazzar was poorly known from surviving historical sources, which led some critics to question Daniel's account. In the nineteenth century, cuneiform discoveries supplied independent Babylonian evidence for Belshazzar. The Nabonidus cylinders discovered at Ur in 1854 identify Belshazzar as Nabonidus's son.

Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar's "father." In biblical and ancient usage, family terms can sometimes be used more broadly for an ancestor or predecessor. The surviving evidence does not securely establish that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's biological father.

Daniel 5 repeatedly offers Daniel the position of "third ruler in the kingdom" (5:7, 16, 29). This fits well with a setting in which Nabonidus was king and Belshazzar already held high royal authority. It is best treated as a striking fit with the historical situation rather than as proof of a precisely defined constitutional office.

Belshazzar Knew Better

READ: Daniel 5:17–23

Daniel recounts Nebuchadnezzar's greatness, pride, humiliation, and eventual recognition that "the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will" (Daniel 5:21).

DANIEL 5:22: "And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this."

NEBUCHADNEZZAR LEARNED THROUGH HUMILIATION WHAT BELSHAZZAR COULD HAVE LEARNED THROUGH HISTORY.

WISDOM DOESN'T HAVE TO EXPERIENCE EVERYTHING TO LEARN FROM IT.

Wise people can learn from both the successes and the failures of others.

The Writing Interpreted

READ: Daniel 5:24–28

- MENE — God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and brought it to an end.

- TEKEL — Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting.
- PERES — The kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

The Statue of Daniel 2

The fall of Babylon moves Daniel's story into the next kingdom represented in Nebuchadnezzar's statue:

- Head of gold — Babylon (Daniel 2:37–38)
- Chest and arms of silver — the kingdom that follows Babylon, identified in Daniel 5:28 with the Medes and Persians.

Daniel's point is not merely to chart political history. Kingdoms change because the Most High rules over human kingdoms.

Babylon Falls

READ: Daniel 5:29–31

Belshazzar is killed that very night, and the Babylonian kingdom passes into Medo-Persian hands. Daniel emphasizes the theological reason for the fall: God had numbered Babylon's days.

PRIDE CAN BUILD SOMETHING GREAT, BUT IT CAN'T BUILD SOMETHING THAT LASTS.

5. Pride and Humility

READ: Proverbs 16:18

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Nebuchadnezzar experienced it. Belshazzar experienced it. Babylon experienced it.

READ: James 4:6

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

PRIDE PUTS US IN OPPOSITION TO GOD.

READ: James 4:10

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

PRIDE TRIES TO TAKE FOR ITSELF WHAT FAITH TRUSTS GOD TO GIVE.

6. Closing Truth

Nebuchadnezzar looked over Babylon and boasted about what he had built. Years later, Belshazzar sat inside that same Babylon believing he was secure. That very night, Babylon fell.

PRIDE CAN BUILD SOMETHING GREAT, BUT IT CAN'T BUILD SOMETHING THAT LASTS.

Kings come and go. Kingdoms rise and fall. Babylon fell, and Medo-Persia would eventually fall as well.

BUT GOD'S KINGDOM WILL NEVER BE DESTROYED. — Daniel 2:44

Key Takeaways

- God remains sovereign even when circumstances make it appear that His people have lost.
- Pride often grows when we forget that what we have has ultimately been received from God.
- Faith trusts God rather than trying to secure greatness, significance, and security apart from Him.

- Wisdom learns from the successes and failures of others.
- God is able to humble the proud, and Scripture calls us to humble ourselves before Him.
- Human kingdoms do not last. God's kingdom does.