

# **The Sin That God Will Not Tolerate**

**Daniel 4:1-37**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula at the West  
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Harry Truman, not the President by the same name, a 65-year-old man affectionately called “Ole Harry,” lived in the great Northwest. He did a very unwise thing. He should have known better but his stubbornness led him to a bad decision that cost him his life. “Ole Harry” worked as one of the caretakers at a recreational lodge near Mt. Saint Helens, Washington. For days, scientists and geologists had warned that a great eruption of the mountain would take place. The seismograph needles ran wild. Radio and television reports warned everyone to get out of the area. State policemen entered the area surrounding the mountain, blasting out the warning over and over again for the people to move out. Harry Truman refused to budge. He had worked in the place for years and nothing had ever happened before. Friends and neighbors pleaded with him to go with them, but all in vain. One climactic moment in May, 1980, the top of the mountain blew up. Ash, cinder, and rock went ten miles into the air. Forests and houses and plains and lakes for 150 square miles were leveled and blotted out with lava sand rock. Harry Truman lies buried someplace beneath the billions of tons of all that spewed forth from Mt. Saint Helens. Harry’s self-sufficiency, independence, trust in himself, refusal to listen to others, and his idea that nothing could happen but that he could handle it, cost him his life.

This self-sufficient, self-reliant, independent mindset is called pride. Pride is anti-god state of mind. Pride is public enemy number one in the Bible. God will deal with all sin but pride is especially an affront to him. The Bible says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Pride is an excessively high opinion of self. It is trusting in ourselves. It is living our lives without God. It is human dependency and self-sufficiency. It can take the form of boastfulness, or even constant self-depreciation. It is an anti-god state of mind that says, “Look at me. Notice me. Be impressed with me. Give glory to myself.” The Bible says that God hates the proud look (Prov. 6:17).

Pride is the original sin. An angel created by God wanted to be independent of God and lead a rebellion in heaven. He wanted to rise to the

equal with God. Pride appears to be the condemnation of the devil (I Tim. 3:6). He wanted to take control. That's the origin of Satan and his angels. In the Garden of Eden, Satan appealed to Adam and Eve, our original parents, to be self-directed. The devil lied to them and tempted them to eat the forbidden fruit. "You shall not surely die," he said, "but you shall be as god." In other words, "You don't have to take directions and instructions from anyone. You can be your own god."

We all struggle with pride. As children, we begin to glory in ourselves. We magnify our strengths, not our weaknesses. We promote our abilities in swimming, music, speaking, memorizing, analyzing, organizing, Bible knowledge, our intelligence, our beauty, or our ability to persuade and sell and make friends.

Our story today concerns King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4. God works in his life to teach him some valuable lessons we can learn from, too. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon from 605 B.C. to 562 B. C., for 43 years. He was a world leader, a conquering hero, a magnificent architect, and a city planner. God had been working with him now for 32 years, assuming that this story occurred at the end of his reign. This is the last reference to him in Daniel. The insane experience lasted seven years, a year to get ready, maybe a year to overcome at the end, so this means our story would begin about 571 B. C.

Nebuchadnezzar had been working with Daniel since 605 B.C. Thirty-two years later Nebuchadnezzar confesses faith in God. We today like things done instantly. We want instant potatoes, instant tea, one minute microwaves, five minute pizzas, and a television show that solves all mysteries in 60 minutes. About the only thing we have of any longevity is a 30-year mortgage. God works slowly, but thoroughly.

The main point of our story is found in verses 17, 25 and 26. Let's read those verses: [read them].

Verse 26 says, "Heaven rules." This means that God is in control. Nebuchadnezzar had to come to grips with God. God had made him what he was. Everything we have is from God. In everything, when people compliment us on a task well done, and it is right and good that we should give and receive meaningful compliments, we should always say, "God be praised."

## **The Story**

This story is told in the first person. It is a drama. This section of Daniel, from 2:4 through chapter 7, is written in Aramaic, the international language of the day. Here the king wants everyone to know his sins and its results. This is the most embarrassing moment of his life.

Verses 1-3 are a prologue and a conclusion. The king addresses his words to everybody. He tells what God has done. God's works endure and they are permanent.

Verses 4-18 begin the story of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. The story of his first dream of the large, dazzling statue of gold, silver, brass, and iron and clay are in chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar called all his wise men out but none of them except Daniel could interpret the dream. At the beginning, Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel by the new name the king had given him, a name from the Babylonian deity Bel. But Daniel gives honor and glory to the God of heaven, not Bel, who is working in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

In verses 19-27 Daniel gives the interpretation. Daniel regretfully tells the king that he is like a tree that will be cut down by God. Nebuchadnezzar will not be destroyed because the stump of the tree remained. However, Nebuchadnezzar would live like a wild animal. This is an insanity known as lycanthropy from "lycanus," which means "wolf" and "anthropos," which is "man." The technical name for Nebuchadnezzar's insanity is boanthropy from "bovine" (cow or ox) and "anthropos" (man). This is to live like an ox. His hair would grow like feathers and his nails like claws. This would last for seven times which means for seven years. It would take this long for Nebuchadnezzar to learn his lesson (read vs. 17, 25, 26). His kingdom would eventually be restored. Daniel expresses he hope that this will not come if Nebuchadnezzar would renounce his sins and his wickedness and do what is right and be kind to the oppressed.

In verses 18-30, the dream is fulfilled. Twelve months later, Nebuchadnezzar was boasting and glorying in himself in the greatness of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was full of egotism. Note what he said: "I have built. . .by my mighty power. . .for the glory of my majesty." He worshiped no god save his own sovereign power and will.

It is true that Babylon was a great city. It had the famous Hanging Gardens, walls, gates, streets, and temples. Babylon was the largest and most powerful city of antiquity. Some scholars say that its population was about 1,200,000. The city was surrounded by a deep, wide moat, filled with water, next to which was a wall 87 feet broad and up to 300 feet high. The top of the wall was wide enough for four chariots to be driven abreast. There were streets intersecting and running to the twelve gates. The famed Ishtar Gate opened unto the Processional Way, an elaborately ornamented

street leading to the temple of Marduk, one of fifty temples within the city. The river Euphrates ran through the city but there were tall levees on either side to prevent it from damaging things when it was at flood stage. The Hanging Gardens were a man-made hill, 400 feet on each side that rose to a height of 350 feet.

But in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's self-glorification, God spoke. God keeps his word. The lesson will be learned.

Immediately things begin to happen. The changes came quickly. The officers noticed. We don't know how it happened but one writer imagined this:

In the twinkling of an eye, Nebuchadnezzar became a raving maniac. With wild shrieks he rushed down from the room and down the staircase as the crown of gold toppled from his head. Across the tiled floor of the throne room he raced, tearing from his body his regal robes and scattering them as he went. Through the doors and down the corridors he ran bellowing like a wounded bull while the palace retainers stood by in consternation. By the time he issued from the great door of the palace he was very little encumbered with garments of any kind, only his tunic and short trousers remaining, and these he also discarded as he continued his mad flight down Palace Way. Nebuchadnezzar, the proud and dignified monarchy of the greatest empire of ancient times, was running down the street of his capital city, stripped, stark naked.

[James Graham, The Prophet-Statesman, p. 110, quoted by Donald K. Campbell, Daniel: God's Man in a Secular Society. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1988, p. 68]

R. K. Harrison in his Introduction to the Old Testament tells of a case similar to this that he encountered in a British mental institution. Here's the way he describes the man's behavior:

His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. . . .He never ate institutional food with the other inmates, and his only drink was water. . . .The writer was able to examine him cursorily, and

the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a course, thickening condition of the fingernails.

[Introduction to the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969, pp 1116-17].

The government ran without the king. Nebuchadnezzar had organized his administration well. Daniel functioned at the top. God preserved his kingdom. For seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's fingernails grew incredibly long. His palms calloused like the soles of his feet. He grew a long, tangled beard. His body was covered with seven years of dirt.

In verses 34-37, the lesson is finally learned. When the seven years were up, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God. His sanity returned. Nebuchadnezzar's return to sanity was like coming out of a coma or a mental illness. He praised God who is in control (vs. 34-35). He was restored to power (vs. 36-37). Here's Nebuchadnezzar's grand conclusion: "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" (v. 37).

### **The Lessons for Us**

What can we learn from this story? What is God saying to us now?

**First, we learn that God is in control.** God is sovereign. Heaven rules. God is not just "up there," but "down here." God cares about what happens here. His will will be done in heaven and on earth. At the end of each of the first six chapters of Daniel, there is a statement to the effect that God rules in the kingdoms of men, that God is sovereign and in control, and that whatever happens, happens with the permission of God.

The kings that rule the earth are nothing compared to God who rules both heaven and earth. When Louis XIV of France died, his funeral was conducted in Notre Dame Cathedral. The body lay in full view in an open casket. The preacher began by repeating these words twice, "Only God is great. Only God is great." The rich, the mighty, the powerful do not rule forever by their strength.

Fortunes that take a lifetime to build can be lost in a day. In October, 1987, on Black Monday the Dow Jones dropped 508 points. Men like Sam Walton lost billions in half a day. Three years ago some of us lost 40% of our retirement savings when the stock market dropped from 14,000 to 7,000.

We can lose not just our fortunes, but also our health. We can appear healthy today but within a week we could be diagnosed with a terminal disease or suffer immediate death by cardiac arrest. Whether we live only another seven days or another seventy years, we are all terminal. Lesson number one: God is in control.

**Second, we learn that the things of earth do not guarantee permanence or success.** Babylon was fabulous. Nebuchadnezzar was mighty. But today, both are gone forever. In order to show us that a man's life does not consist of the things he possesses, Jesus told about a rich man who trusted in all his material possessions. He thought that these things guaranteed that he would live a long and happy life but the Lord said to him, "You fool. This night you will die and then what will become of all the things you have accumulated?" (Luke 12:15-20). We get so wrapped up in the things of this world, and finding answers and solving problems, and doing things, that we forget the most important thing of all: our relationship with God. Nothing is more important than that. Lesson number two: The grandeur, gold and glory of this earth do not last.

**Third, we learn that we need to humbly seek to love, honor and obey God.** Everything we have comes from God. The Bible says, "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time" (I Peter 5:5, 6).

We are to glory in nothing except in the Lord. In the OT book of Jeremiah, God says, "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast alone about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23-24). This verse is quoted by the apostle Paul in the NT. He writes that Jesus Christ is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption" and that we should not boast in anything else but the Lord (I Cor. 1:30-31). Paul wrote to the Galatians, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord" (6:14). Lesson number three: Be humble before God.

**Fourth, we learn that God will humble us.** God hates pride. "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). In the Bible, God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, Haman, Herod, Pilate, and others. In secular history, God humbled Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Khrushchev, Saddam Hussein, and others. God humbled nations. In 1958, when the first Soviet satellite touched outer space, Moscow's magazine said, "Creation from a Communist point of view is at last under

new management.” The Communists claimed the prerogative of God. They claimed that they, not God, proposed and disposed. Yet, 33 years later, in the last week of December, 1991, the great Communist superpower of Lenin and Stalin, the USSR, toppled and fell and is no more. The hammer and sickle flag was lowered from the Kremlin and the USSR was no more. God humbled them and he has a way of humbling us all.

The history of humanity is (1) the raising up of a nation by the blessing of God, (2) men and women taking glory to themselves, and (3) God tearing them down in order to show that he is the Most High God and not mankind.

[James M. Boice, Daniel: An Expository Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989, p. 56].

America is no exception. If our nation does not humble herself before God, the same thing that happened to Babylon, the Third Reich, the USSR, and other kings and kingdoms will happen to us. God is no respecter of persons or of nations. America is rapidly becoming like the Gentile nations of Romans chapter 1, verses 18-32. Here men and women rejected God, worshiped things, and entered into sexual perversions. Because they rejected him, God gave them up to a reprobate mind and life. A reprobate mind not only does evil but it demands that its evil be recognized as equal to the purity and holiness of God’s ways. Any time we justify our sins and demand that they be declared the same as the righteous demands of God, then we are guilty. Today, forces and movements in our country are carrying us forward toward judgment. If we will not have God, we will go down, down, down. Without God, there is no point at which we will stop in our moral decline. Unless we repent, what happened to Babylon, Napoleon and his empire, the Third Reich, and the USSR will happen to us.

God has a way of turning our strengths against us. When we believers become too self-confident, too independent of God, God disciplines us. The Bible says, “Those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines” (Heb. 12:4). God may use intense pain or hardship to remove ingratitude or egotism from our lives. The Lord does this, not because he is eager to punish us, but because he loves us so much that he wants us to draw closer to him and this is the only way to get our attention and humble us before him.

A woman visiting in Switzerland came to a sheepfold on one of her daily walks. Venturing in, she saw the shepherd seated on the ground with his flock around him. Nearby, on a pile of straw lay a single sheep that seemed to be suffering. Looking closely, the woman saw that its leg was broken. Her sympathy went out to the suffering animal and she asked the shepherd how it happened.

“I broke it myself,” he said sadly, then explained. “Of all the sheep in my flock, this one was the most wayward. It would not obey my voice and would not follow when I was leading the flock. On more than one occasion, it wandered to the edge of a perilous cliff. And not only was it disobedience itself, but it was leading other sheep astray. Based on my experience with this kind of sheep, I knew I had no choice. I broke its leg. The next day I took food and it tried to bite me. After letting it lie alone for a couple of days, I went back and it not only eagerly took the food but licked my hand and showed every sign of submission and affection.

“And now, let me say this, When this sheep is well, it will be the model of my entire flock. No sheep will hear my voice so quickly nor follow so closely. Instead of leading others away, it will be an example of devotion and obedience. In short, a complete change will come into the life of this wayward sheep. It will have learned obedience through its sufferings.”

[Donald Campbell, Daniel, pp. 65-6]

God is the good shepherd. He “breaks our legs” in order to save us from our own self-destruction. Where would Nebuchadnezzar have ended up if God had not humbled him? Where would Nebuchadnezzar be if he had not confessed the Lordship of our eternal God? He would be in hell. Where will we end up in our own self-driven lives if God does not humble us? The same place. God disciplines us because he wants our holiness. He wants our best. And the best thing we can ever do is to love, honor and obey God. That’s the only way to have the greatest life possible.

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