

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

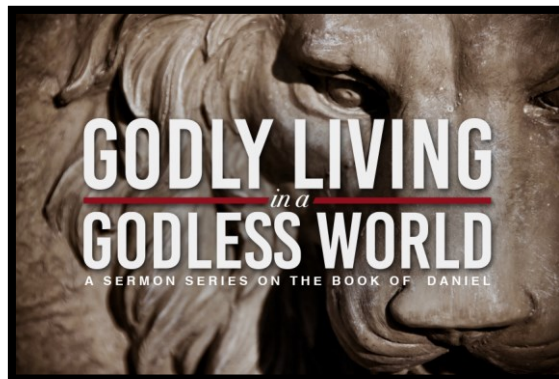
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 5:1-9

Written By

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Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put our current culture war in perspective with this insightful remark years ago:

But the fight for our planet, physical and spiritual, a fight of cosmic proportions, is not a vague matter of the future; it has already started. The forces of Evil have begun their decisive offensive. You can feel their pressure, yet your screens and publications are full of prescribed smiles and raised glasses. What is the joy about?

Yes, what is the joy all about? On the one hand, we are kept amused and engrossed with our Facebook accounts, twittering anything and everything, rushing off to the next party, downloading the next Netflix movie, renting even more movies on Redbox so we're not bored on a given weekend, taking in the next big game, tuning into the latest and endless reality shows, texting every chance we get, taking phone shots of everything from the food we're eating at a restaurant to dumb stuff our friends are doing, and so on and so forth.

But, really, what is all the joy about because, on the other hand, times do smell of sunset because, as Krauthammer writes, ". . . it is not enough for the deviant to be normalized. The normal must be found to deviant." Or, to put it in biblical terms: spiritual darkness is normalized and spiritual light is criminalized. We party on while all around us the rot of spiritual darkness and false ideologies and philosophies spread at an ever-alarming rate:

- Post-modernism, with its hatred of absolute moral and spiritual truth is a cancer on our culture causing us to embrace any and all forms of immoral behavior as moral based on the premise if it is true for you it must be true for me.
- Utilitarian individualism, with its emphasis on individuals making moral judgments based on what will increase pleasure and minimize pain, has replaced man's accountability to God as the measure of what is right and wrong.
- Self-expression, bathed in post-modern and utilitarian thinking, has led to immoral expressions which are constantly shocking and then viewed as normal.
- Discussion of morals within the framework of a man being responsible to a transcendent being, has descended to who can shout the other person down based on their hateful, discriminatory thinking.
- Tolerance, which is the one many new commandments of our Christless culture, is used like a battering ram to demolish traditional and biblical views of everything which use to hold us together. How ironic, isn't it? Those who shout for tolerance are really the most intolerant among us, and we haven't seen anything yet as they continue to gain ground.
- Sexual immorality, which is perhaps the god of our culture, has worked hard to be seen as sexually moral, resulting in the persecution and prosecution of anyone and everyone who'd dare say otherwise.
- Government fiscal irresponsibility, which has led to our current \$21 trillion dollar, ever-increasing debt load, will eventually cause a crash because you can't spend more than you take in forever. It's a simple rule of accounting math. One day the whole thing comes crashing down because political leaders of both parties don't appear to have the collective desire to radically cut their spending. No, they don't cut. They spend away as if there is no tomorrow. At their current rate of spending our tax dollars, there eventually won't be a tomorrow. And it will be directly related to two words: unchecked power and greed.

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. We live in dangerous times as the godless among us happily and willingly slide into further sin.

We, however, are not the first culture to head toward a predictable crash. Babylon wrote the non-fiction bestseller on that tragic topic. Daniel chapter 5 recounts what happens when the leaders of a nation depart from worshipping and recognizing the true, living God and embrace anything and everything other than Him. Trust me, this is one of the most ominous passages in the inspired Scriptures. It is also one of the most practical for our day and time. Why? It stands as a warning for us to not go down the reckless roads. It also instructs godly people regarding how they should live as the culture careens toward chaos. Finally, it reminds us on a personal level that willful rejection of God, willful departure from His truths, no matter what the rationalizations are, never led one to personal and spiritual peace and prosperity but spiritual unrest and poverty.

The Babylonians didn't listen to God. I trust we will. What did God say in this eye-opening chapter?

Unchecked Sinful Slides Are Costly—Nationally & Personally (Daniel 5:1-31)

Yes, to reject God is to embrace cultural chaos, the welcoming of Statist power to control the turbulence caused by the absence of over-arching truth, and ultimately the discipline and judgment of God who desires holiness above all else. To read Daniel chapter 5 is to identify seven steps of national and personal demise. Mark them well so you can do your part in opposing them, so you can work radically and constantly in promoting light over darkness.

You'll Witness A Denial (Daniel 5:1)

Denial in reference to what?

Nationally it is erroneously thinking that you are too big to fail, to fall apart, and to crash ... completely. You have troops and weapons for national offense and defense. But what happens when your political leaders lack the will to unleash those troops and weapons against a religious crazed, ruthless, and implacable foe who is embedded outside and inside your country? What happens when vast amounts of money has to be moved from the military to the ever-expanding and dependent populace to keep them happy and satisfied with those in power?

Individually, it is erroneously thinking that given your current and carnal life trajectory nothing negative and destructive could happen to *you*, of all people. After all, you are just enjoying your passions, and what is the harm in that? You are just living free without any real definable moral and/or spiritual restraints, and how could this be ultimately costly since everyone else is doing it, or so goes the mantra. Well, has it ever occurred to you that just maybe everyone is headed to the same chaotic destination you are? Ever thought of that?

Both of these concepts were historically played out in the life of one self-consumed, I'm-the-smartest-guy-in-the-room Babylonian politician in 553 B.C. His name? Who can forget it? Belshazzar, the last king of the once glorious Babylonian Empire. His name didn't help him either. Translated it means "the god Bel has protected the king." Unfortunately, Bel, the supreme Babylonian god, also known as Marduk (Old Testament Merodach), was no god at all but just a convenient concoction to keep people from worship the true God. And so it goes with godless leaders and people. They devise belief systems in the place of God in order to give them personal peace and power over others. In the end, however, those belief systems are as vacuous as space.

What led King Belshazzar to erroneously believe his country was too big to fail? To answer this pivotal query, we must first read the biblical text before us and then dig into the historical background leading up to this particular snapshot of Babylon's sudden and catastrophic demise.

¹ Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

In order to understand the ramifications of this party to end all political/military parties, we have to understand the historical context.

King Nebuchadnezzar led Babylon to the zenith of power as the sole superpower of the earth in his forty-three year career (605-562 B.C.). During this time, he conquered and controlled the nations surrounding his ever-expanding empire. He merely went beyond where his forefather, Nabopolassar had traveled politically and militarily.

Nabopolassar, along with the help of the Medes, vanquished the world power of the day, the Assyrians. In October of 626, Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrians outside of Babylon, resulting in his seizure of the coveted throne. In 614, Cyaxares destroyed the Assyrian capital of Asshur. In 612, the Medes and Babylonians teamed up to take down Nineveh. In 610, Nabopolassar routed the remaining Assyrian forces in the ancient city of Haran.



With Assyria out of the way, Babylon was positioned to rise to world prominence, which it did under *Nebuchadnezzar* (605-562 B.C.). In the spring of 605, he defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish after bloody hand to hand combat. He next moved to conquer the entire Syrian/Palestian region, positioning troops in Egypt to protect his southern flank and to keep this ancient foe in check. On three separate occasions he entered and defeated the Jews, and carried away their brightest and best people to Babylon (605). Daniel and his friends became Babylonian slaves in the first wave of attack. In the third military incursion he leveled Jerusalem (586). For the rest of his reign he enjoyed a firm grip on the then known world, but as we saw in Daniel chapter 4, it was toward the end of his reign he turned his life over to the living God. Amazing. What a story of God's rich, inexorable grace.

Also, while Nebuchadnezzar was focused on expanding his empire to the west throughout his career, his former ally, the Median king Cyaxares, wasted no time expanding his kingdom to east, subduing people in the Iranian region and establishing his capital in Ecbatana. It would be an ally who would become an enemy, as we shall see.

When Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. (August-September), his kingdom, as prophesied by Daniel in chapter 2, began to lose its brilliance and power. His son, *Evil-merodach* (2 Kings 25:27ff; Jeremiah 52:31-34) reigned for two years (562-560 B.C.). *Neriglissor* assassinated Evil-merodach, his brother-in-law, and reigned from 560-556 B.C. He was instrumental in releasing the prophet Jeremiah from prison (586 B.C.), but *Labashi-marduk* seized the throne from this evil king in 555 B.C. His rule ended shortly when he was replaced by *Nabonidus* in 556 B.C. He quickly formed a co-regency with his

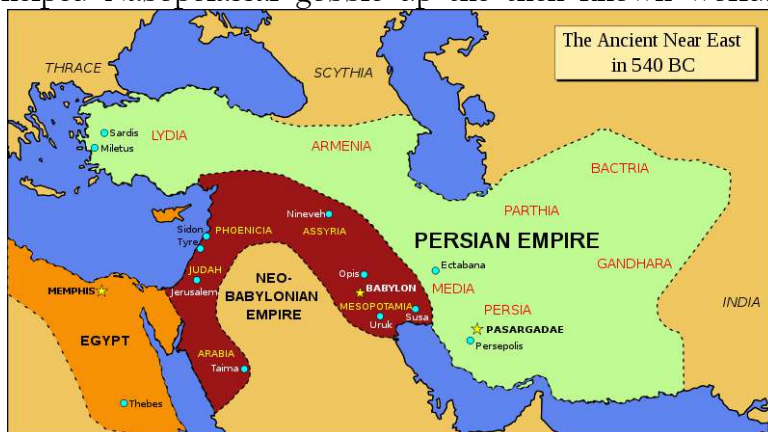
son, *Belshazzar*. For years, scholars believed the Bible was inaccurate in calling Belshazzar Babylon's last king; however, the discovery of what is now called the Nabonidus Cylinders, has laid this thinking to rest because in one of these cylinders, inscribed in cuneiform, Nabonidus mentions his first-born son, Belshazzar. From 556 to 553 B.C. they ruled together, but in 553 Nabonidus left to spend the majority of his time at the southern Arabian oasis called Teima, leaving Belshazzar in almost complete control of the country.

Please bear in mind that the prophecies of Daniel chapters 7 and 8 occurred during the reign of Belshazzar. In fact, chronologically, these prophecies concerning the rise and fall of Babylon at the hands of Medo-Persia (Daniel 7), followed by the fall of Medo-Perisan by the Greeks (Daniel 8), occurred between Daniel chapter 4 and 5. Scholars believe, then, Daniel's prophecy in chapter 7 occurred in 553 B.C., or the first year of Belshazzar's co-regency (Daniel 7:1), while chapter 8 occurred in 550 B.C. during the king's third year of rule (Daniel 8:1). Why is this important to note? God gave Daniel, who was probably in his late sixties or early seventies, divine insight into the rise and fall of Babylon prior to the tragic events listed in Daniel 5. Put differently, God equipped his saint to be prepared to know what to say in His behalf to a nation when they needed a divine word prior to judgment. God will equip and position you as well. Are you ready to speak up and out for him? More on that in a future study.

At this juncture, it is enough to simply note that Belshazzar had the former prophecies of God, as disclosed to his grandfather, at his beckoned call. He knew the Babylonian kingdom was destined for destruction, but he sought to deny the revelation despite veracity of that information from his own grandfather. Yes, his grandfather. Nabonidus probably married Nitocris, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, thereby putting his first-born son in the royal blood-line. He probably also knew of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning Babylon, especially the promise of a seventy-year captivity (Jeremiah 29:10). Since his grandfather placed the Jews in captivity starting in 605 B.C. and this was only 539 B.C. he probably felt quite confident he had a firm control of the complex geo-political situation which surrounded him on this evening. So, he partied, big time.

Let's look at this in more detail.

Babylon's gravest enemy was their former ally, Medo-Persia. Cyaxares had helped Nabopolassar gobble up the then known world, but, then, Babylon rose to



prominence over Medi-Persia. Astyages, the son of Cyaxares, ruled from 585 to 550 B.C. When Cyrus, the Persian, rose up and took over the entire upper Mesopotamian area in a blitzkrieg fashion by dethroning Astyages in Ecbatana in 550 B.C., I'm sure Nabonidus was not too thrilled. The dust had

barely settled when Cyrus brilliantly used his military forces to conquer all the lands

around Babylon, extending his empire to the Aegean Sea by conquering Asia Minor. Shocking, this unknown man came out of nowhere and quickly turned his small kingdom in a menacing one, leaving clueless Babylon all alone.

One by one, Babylonian cities fell to the advancing armies of Cyrus, as prophesied. A former Babylonian general, Gubaru, defected to the enemy forces, and directed attacks against his former people (Isaiah 41:4-7; 46:1ff). Nabonidus was conveniently in his oasis hideaway, while his son, Belshazzar, held the mighty fortified city of Babylon, a city too powerful, too big to fall. Right.

What did King Belshazzar do with the armies of Cyrus approaching the gates of his citadel? He partied with his troops. According to Herodotus and Xenophon, two days after the Persians conquered Opis, or the modern city of Baghdad, which is about 50 miles north of Babylon, they had a party to end all parties.¹ Talk about denial. He hid behind his supposedly impregnable fortifications. The reason why he could have one thousand of his choice leaders with him for a drink fest was because they had logically fled to the safety of the capital city in light of the advance of Cyrus' crack troops. Shocking, isn't it? King Belshazzar's pride kept him from reading the world geo-political situation correctly. He, like most leaders of powerful countries, thought he, of all people, they ... were too big to fail, regardless of what God had said. Really, what was the joy about? Darkness was descending with the speed of a merciless meteor and the political and military leaders just didn't get it, nor did they grasp the reason(s) for the coming judgment.

We see the same mentality in our world, do we not? We have the best weaponry money can buy. We have the best trained troops a people could ever want for their defense. We have 8,848 tanks, 41,062 armored fighting vehicles, and 1,934 self-propelled guns, total aircraft stands at 13,444; 2,308 fighters, 6,084 helicopters, 957 attack helicopters, 19 aircraft carriers, 62 destroyers, and 75 submarines, not to mention the 6,970 nuclear weapons we possess. We have a history of paying the price to hold back the encroachment of evil armies (WWI, 4,734,991 soldiers deployed; WWII, 16,112,566 deployed; Korea, 1,789,000 deployed, Vietnam, 3,403,000 deployed; Gulf War, 694,550 deployed, Iraq-Afghanistan War, 2,500,000 deployed). We have historically been unified around transcendent truths. We have humbly submitted to the unique structure of our Constitution. We have governed ourselves by the rule of law.

But things have radically changed from the top down, haven't they? Arrogance and godless ideology permeate our leadership. Our Constitution is proudly seen to be a fluid document, destined for change to please an ever-darkening culture. Our laws for governance, well, they are up for grabs to the most brazen leader to seize and change, at will. Our moral fiber is being ripped to shreds all in the name of love, compassion, and non-discrimination. Our leaders, followed by our people, think we can flaunt and change the laws, and we can continue onto a state of prosperity. They proudly think we can continue to take in people who do not have our best interests at heart and there will not be long-term internal issues which might threaten us. Church leaders proudly think they can toss God's eternal Word to the wind, opting to embrace interpretations which run contrary to what God has clearly said. And we have new enemies who have risen to prominence in a blitzkrieg fashion because we fail to collectively see them as viable

¹ Ronald W. Pierce, *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2015), 84.

threats to our existence. We pridefully think we can stay safe inside Babylon and everything will be fine. And we party on, keeping ourselves engaged in anything and everything, so we don't have to pay attention to the troops amassing inside and outside the gates.

What do we need? Two things. Humility and confession before the throne of the living God. The words of the Chronicler are certainly in order:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

We are not too big to fail, but we should not think we are too big to get down on our knees and humble ourselves before the throne of the Most High God. Nationally, this is what we need to do. Individually, the same principle holds true. If you live as if nothing will happen to you even though you willfully live contrary to God's natural and revealed law, think again. The slide of sin is eventually costly to nations and to people individually. If your life is a living illustration of the advancement of the armies of sin against your citadel, it's time to get real and honest.

- Confess Christ as your Lord and Savior, “. . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).
- “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).
- “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
- “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

As our country parties on while the barbarians are inside and outside the gates, will you commit to living for God, at all costs? Will you resolve to be sober while the culture is drunk? Will you be one, out of the many, who believes God's Word when it says there is a price to pay for living a godless life? Will you commit, this day, to do your part, be what it may, to awaken your countrymen and women to their stratified levels of denial? Will you, as the leader of your family, decree this day you will make moral education the backbone of your child rearing? Will you tell God this day you will do your part to hand down a biblical morality, not a cultural morality to your children?

The once great and powerful Roman Empire thought it was too great to fall, but it did in the fifth century A.D. The Visigoths, a Germanic tribe with elite and superior horse cavalry eventually sacked the last vestige of the Roman Empire. Over the next few centuries, chaos ruled and reigned as Germanic tribes fought each other for power and control (sound familiar?). The well-ordered western world simply crumbled into a sea of absolute disorder and dismay.

What turned early medieval Europe back from the edge of cultural oblivion when it seemed all hope was lost? Here's the answer from the late Charles Colson:

Instead of conforming to the barbarian culture of the Dark Ages, the medieval church modeled a counter-culture to a world engulfed by destruction and confusion. Thousands of monastic orders spread across Europe, characterized by discipline, creativity, and a coherence and moral order lacking in the world around them. Monks preserved not only the Scriptures but classical literature as well; they were busy not only at their prayers but in clearing land, building towns, and harvesting crops. When little else shone forth, these religious provided attractive models of communities of caring and character, and in the process they preserved both faith and civilization itself. . . . Living by a value system dictated by the kingdom of God, they rejected both Roman and barbarian lapses of character, uprooting such attitudes as the aversion to physical labor predominant among the Roman masses and the barbarian love of violence. As a point of light in a dark age, they called attention to the values of an endless age. In so doing, they saved their civilization.²

It is now our turn, with God's help, to do what needs to be done to make sure righteousness replaces unrighteousness so peace and prosperity can rule and reign. You may not be classified as a monk, but you can be God's messenger as the people around you party on.

² Charles Colson, *Against the Night* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1989), 132-134.