

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

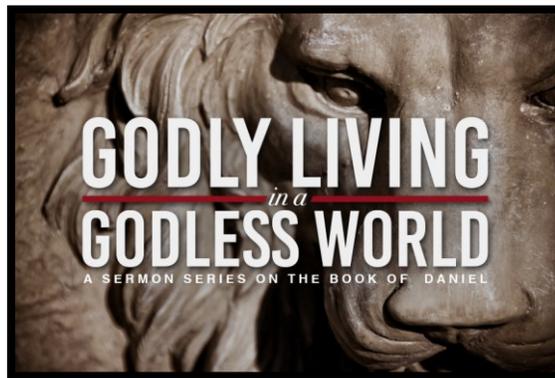
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 5:10-17

Written By

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Across a deep canyon from a beach house we stayed at last summer is majestic, green, beautiful tree. Looking at it from this angle, everything looks fine. However, from a wider vantage point you can readily see the tree is in serious trouble. Years of erosion at its base has exposed its once supportive roots, and if this situation is not addressed and rectified the once lofty tree will slide quickly to its death in the lush green canyon below.

Allegorically, we, as a nation, are this tree. False philosophies from deism to post-modernism have, like a pelting, perpetual rain, eroded the protective soil of our country, leaving us not only exposed to the cunning of our enemies, but they have caused us to politically, personally, monetarily, sexually, and educationally to throw common sense to the wind and embrace any notion or worldview, no matter how counter-intuitive and radical it/they may be, so long as it has nothing to do with Judeo-Christianity. The bathroom battles this year are just one illustration of many in our country which is reaching a moral, spiritual erosion point of no return. The riots against a presidential candidate, unheard of just a few years ago from a nation which held to a



modicum of respect for others who do not hold your viewpoint, by people calling for communistic and destructive socialism instead of constitutionalism are just another sign we are not far from slipping into the chaos of the canyon below. Yes, the erosion started out in a slow, imperceptible fashion; however, now it is picking up speed and there is not much dirt left to protect the compromised tree.



Some two thousand and five hundred years ago Babylon, the mightiest political tree on the planet, finally fell and crashed into the canyon below. Years of erosion brought on by arrogant politicians, false priests who told the people what they wanted to hear not what they needed to hear, a weakened military, a love affair with wealth and comfort, an undue belief in the invincibility of the nation, worship of a plethora of all the wrong gods created by man, and a willingness to

ultimately reject the outright miraculous actions and teachings of the living God through four young Jewish believers attributed to the eventual demise of the once glorious empire.

Wise people study and learn from allegorical equations like this. Wise people take what they learn and make radical adjustments so the roots are protected. Wise people stare across the deep ravine at the tree of their nation or the tree called their life and readily realize the overarching premise from Daniel chapter five is timeless and trustworthy:

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

Whether the focus is a nation or a person the biblically based truth is inexorable and unchanging. Reject God and willfully and pridefully embrace sinful worldviews, resulting in unchecked sinful living typically masquerading as morally acceptable behavior, and in time your nation or life will reach a tragic point of no return as God moves to judge and discipline. The Babylonian banquet, or should I say, drunken and sacrilegious political and military party depicted in Daniel chapter 5, validates the outcome of what eventually occurs when a nation, or a person, lives to flaunt their freedom to live as they see fit detached from the protective compaction of moral and spiritual soil. The high definition snapshots of the pernicious process of soil loss are embedded in the text in question.

- *You'll Witness A Denial* (Daniel 5:1). This is the arrogant notion you can live like you want with no negative repercussions. You might need to rethink this position, quickly.

- *You'll Witness A Desecration* (Daniel 5:2-4). With God and His life-giving teachings extracted and placed off to the side as some type of inferior soil, the nation or person logically attacks and belittles that which is sacred as they bask in their seemingly endless debauchery. Instead of basking, you should start permitting God to start blasting, blasting away at your hardened pride.
- *You'll Witness A Declaration* (Daniel 5:5). God is patient, but He is also holy, which means He will tolerate your sin for a time; however, there always comes the time when He says, "Time's up. The canyon awaits you." The Babylonian elites received this message as God's hand wrote an ominous message on the wall where they partied: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.
- *You'll Witness A Diversion* (Daniel 5:6-9). As the sinful nation or person brushes up against a definitive and disciplinary wake up word from the Almighty, the typical knee-jerk reaction is to seek counsel from the godless counselors who helped erode the soil around your tree in the first place. This is what King Belshazzar did when he asked the sorcerers to explain the writing of God. He contacted the wrong people because he ultimately did not want to hear from God. How hard is the human heart? This hard.

A fifth picture of what occurs during national and personal erosion is located in verses ten through seventeen of this foreboding, fearsome chapter of Babylon's collapse.

You'll Witness A Distinction (Daniel 5:10-17)

What do I mean with this title? Before God moves in judgment/discipline, He always makes sure that sinners, be they a nation or a person, clearly understand His truth and teaching through the courageous communication of His followers.

- Hosea the prophet lived in northern Israel prior to their fall in 722 B.C. God called him to boldly address the widespread spiritual apostasy and corruption of the nation and to challenge them to repent: "You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered ..." (Hosea 10:13-14). History shows that nobody listened from the top of the government down. In time, the 208 year-old tree toppled to its death, but this did not occur without clear, powerful words through God's messenger.
- Jeremiah railed against the flagrant, unchecked sin of his people, as God instructed him: "Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord; I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful, says the LORD; I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 3:12-13).

In dark days God always shows the godless that His people have the spiritual truth they need to hear at a time when erroneous truths abound to their detriment. For King Belshazzar, still shaking from the fear of the supernatural communication written on the wall by God's hand, God's man, Daniel, will step into the bizarre party scene and emphatically demonstrate that God's Word is the THE Word mankind should read and heed.

As we consider this divinely ordained and orchestrated process as disclosed in these divinely inspired verses, we cannot help but see three supportive points emerge.

Bold believers will stand out (Daniel 5:10-12). The darker the day the easier it is for saints to shine brightly. In the darkness of that party, Daniel's godly, humble life shone like a thousand suns. The opening part of this story tells us this much:

¹⁰The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale."

Who was this queen? Verse three tells us the wives of the partiers were already present, so she probably was not Belshazzar's wife. Herodotus' historical account is probably correct in identifying her with Belshazzar's mother, the wife of King Nabonidus and the daughter of the late King Nebuchadnezzar (*The Histories* 1.185-188, published around 425 B.C.). Josephus also holds this position and he speaks of her building and military influence in Babylon, which helps us see how she could interrupt a party of this nature with such a commanding presence (*Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, 10:11.2). Leave it to a gifted, wise woman to take control of a chaotic situation.

With party-goers standing everywhere shaking in fear and wine goblets littering the floor, all eyes looked on the respected Queen Mother as she spoke:

¹¹"There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. ¹²This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.

I am sure you could have heard a pin drop when she stopped talking. As the daughter of King Nebuchadnezzar, she had, no doubt, heard from her father about the greatness of the Jew called Daniel. Had you been him wouldn't you talk to your children at the dinner table about a man of this jaw-dropping spiritual stature? She probably had direct exposure to Daniel as well because he was a key political appointee of her father since he ran the prestigious divinization program in Babylon (Daniel 2:48).

I find her reasons for inviting the eighty to ninety-year-old senior citizen, Daniel, into the mayhem of the moment most intriguing, enlightening, and educational. Since Daniel had arrived in Babylon as a youth, his faith was distinctly showcased among the spiritually rudderless and

powerless Babylonians, and His God also proved His utter distinct nature over the helpless gods of the Empire. From her exposure to Daniel, she zeroed in on several key distinct character traits he possessed from God:

- Illumination (Daniel 5:11)
- Insight (Daniel 5:11)
- Wisdom (Daniel 5:11)
- Extraordinary spirit (Daniel 5:12)
- Knowledge (Daniel 5:12)
- Interpretation of dreams (Daniel 5:12)
- Explanatory ability of enigmas and complex problems (Daniel 5:12)

This level of detail demonstrates she knew Daniel well. His bold character clearly revealed he was no ordinary person, but a person in close contact with the living God. What do these words mean? Let's dig a little deeper.

Illumination, **נְהִיר** (n^{ehîr}), is a hapaxlegomena, meaning it occurs only one time in the Old Testament. Literally, it speaks of a bright light, something akin to a lamp shining in a dark room.¹ Applied to Daniel it denotes his ability to bring revelatory light to a dark, complex situation. When wicked King Ahab contemplated going to war, the prophet Michaiiah gave him light by telling him he would die if he did so (1 Kings 22). Ahab foolishly did not listen but went anyway. He never returned to his throne, but God had given him light to live differently. Daniel had this illumination power.

Insight, **שָׂכַלְתָּנוּ** (śākl^{etānû}), in its base form simply means to possess common sense.² It means to think something over and then to do what is logical, not illogical. If our culture has lost anything it is this. Illogical sense now reigns supremely, resulting in erosion of the moral ground around us at an alarming rate. Daniel stood out distinctly because he spoke common sense truth to those who wrapped themselves in in highly logical and dangerous thinking.

Wisdom, **חֲכָמָה** (ḥokmâ), literally spoke in Old Testament times of possessing the skill to create wonderful things from metal work.³ Applied to a believer like Daniel it denotes the ability to take what you learn from God's Word and apply it to complex life situations either addressed or not addressed by God. Daniel's astute wisdom came directly from God (Daniel 1:17), and it caused him to speak powerfully, critically, and helpfully to all those who would listened to him in tough times. Once again, wisdom is in short supply in our land.

Extra-ordinary spirit, **רוּחַ יִתְיָרָה** (rûah yattîr), merely means to be the best or to be exceptional (Daniel 3:22; 7:7, 19). Once more, to listen to Daniel speak was to be in the presence of someone who stood out from others. When you walked away from him you just knew that he had a close relationship with God which gave him insight into life like no one else. Ever met anyone like this? I have. They are so beneficial to know, especially in dark days.

¹R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1316.

²Ibid., 2257.

³ Ibid., Vol. 1, 647.

Knowledge, מַנְדָּע (manda‘), is derived from the Hebrew verb “to know,” יָדַע (yēda‘). It possesses a wide range of meaning in the Old Testament, covering everything from possessing knowledge about how to hunt skillfully (Genesis 25:27), to gaining insight into what is harmful and/or beneficial through contemplative analysis/thought (Proverbs 1:4; 2:6; 5:2; Ecclesiastes 1:18). In Daniel’s case it probably denotes his ability to know things only God could have told him, coupled with his ability know what to do in a troublesome scenario.

The last two descriptions merely describe his uncanny ability to explain the unknown and seemingly unexplainable. Interpretation, for instance, פִּשָּׁר (pēshar), is a word found in Qumran to describe the how ancient texts were interpreted. Daniel did this when he broke Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams down for him. The explanation of riddles is from וְאַחֲוַיִּת אֲחִידָן (’ahāwāyâ ’āhîdâ). The word picture here is of a Gordian-type knot of a riddle. He could take intricate issues and unravel them like no one else.

No wonder the Queen Mother pointed King Belshazzar to Daniel. He had a proven track record in his Babylonian career with being the go-to person for tough problems and issues, and he never failed to give the much needed insight either. Daniel’s faith and amazing godly character and God-given abilities caused him to be distinct in a godless age.

Ostensibly, all of this is most instructive.

On the one hand, this part of the historical narrative tells us that in desperate, decadent, destructive times God always raises up a Queen Mother to speak sanity into the situation. Put differently, God makes sure someone comes into the room who can, and will, point you to a person who has answers, light, and guidance because they walk with God. Nationally, it might be the person who knows of the apologetic prowess of men like Ravi Zacharias, Os Guinness, Kenneth Boa, Alvin Platinga, Norman Geisler, Alister McGrath, and they use this knowledge to inform leaders who they really need to be speaking with. It might also be folks in key positions who know insightful pastors who have a solid mastery of the Word of God and who need to be brought into a given scenario for the purposes of moral and spiritual illumination. With a phone call men like John MacArthur and John Piper could be contacted and rushed in to bring some common sense to the crazy nature of our culture. Personally, all of this, by way of application, can denote that person in your messed up life who all of a sudden body directs you to a Christian person with a proven track record for speaking God’s truth in a helpful, problem solving fashion. They might point you to a gifted, godly counselor to iron out your marriage issues, or introduce you to a lay Bible teacher with an intimate knowledge of God’s Word and how it should play out in life.

Let me be clear. Whether it is a nation or a person starting to slip into the canyon of chaos, God is going to send you a so-called Queen Mother to point you to someone who can give you a much needed word from God. Would that our nation would turn toward the Daniel’s God has embedded all throughout our society. Would that you would turn to a Daniel-type for your cliff-hanging, nail-biting experience.

On the other hand, this little narrative secondarily underscores the importance of Christian character and contribution in godless days. If a banquet hall full of people needed to hear from God, would someone submit your name based on the power of your Christian character and proven ability to address and solve life’s issue with God’s enablement? When the national chips were down, one woman called for Daniel. Would they call you? Why or why not? Believe me, we need to live lives like Daniel so that when, not if, national and personal lives start

tilting toward the canyon because of their sin, they will call us so we can, with the Spirit's empowerment (Ephesians 1:13-14; 5:18) give them insight for the road ahead.

It's so true. Tenuous times cause truly godly people to stand out from the crowd as the folks who need to be listened to. Will you be distinct? Daniel's character went before him in a positive fashion. Does yours? When you decided to live a distinct life in godless days what should you expect? We encounter the answer to that question starting with verse 13:

Bad unbelievers will ramp up (Daniel 5:13-16). Stated another way: Don't expect the God-rejecting, moral hating, spiritually adrift world to fall willingly and humbly at the feet of God nor the servant of God. Read on and you will see what I mean:

¹³ When Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴"Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. ¹⁵"Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. ¹⁶"But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

Let's make several observations about this interesting encounter.

One, as I said earlier, Daniel was between eighty and ninety. Obviously, he long been forgotten by the progressive young rulers who drove Babylon into the proverbial ground. His quick arrival demonstrates he was still in the city; however, he would never have been invited to a party of this nature. After all, who'd want an octogenarian at a blowout party like this? I wonder what Daniel thought as he entered the room? Did he fix his eyes on the writing on the wall? Did he look in amazement at the flickering light from the temple menorah? Did he accidentally kick temple goblets the fearful Babylonians had thrown on the floor as the hand appeared? Regardless of these question, one question deserves an answer: When you are between eighty and ninety will you be prepared to be used as the voice of God to the godless around you? Will the passion for God and God's word will burn in your soul? Will you be courageous for God all the way to the end?

Two, the absence of the interrogative particle in the King's opening remark tells us this is more of a statement than a question. There is no way Belshazzar did not know who the famous Daniel was. He would have heard of his exploits from his family and countless other sources as he grew up. He just chose other advisors more in tune with what he wanted to hear as he reigned as the supreme ruler. He had absolutely no need of a godly man in his "cabinet," as it were. That would have cramped his prideful style, as we shall see. Based on this, a good translation might be, "So you are Daniel," or "So you are the famous Daniel." The statement dripped with biting, arrogant sarcasm and national condescension. The statement also revealed the king looked upon the godly Daniel as an antiquated joke, the source of old Babylonian wives tales.

Three, by mentioning Daniel's Jewish heredity, King Belshazzar wasted no time in underscoring his anti-Semitic beliefs. The Jews might be in his country but that did not mean he had to like them, like his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar did.

Four, King Belshazzar was a fool who mocked God and God's people. Even in the face of a divine, supernatural event of all events, he chose to openly taunt and denigrate God's follower, Daniel. Note well. Belshazzar highlights how Daniel's interpretive prowess has come to him as mere hearsay. He increases the caustic tension by leaving the word "holy" out of the wording from the Queen mother, viz., "in whom is a spirit of the holy gods." Daniel was the holiest man in the room that night, standing next to one of the most unholy men, but the latter man will not flinch as he slights the former man with this subtle omission. And, just in case you are not convinced Belshazzar was off the proverbial rails here, note how he pridefully says, "Now if you are able to read the inscription ..." If? Are you kidding me? This is the man who years prior told King Nebuchadnezzar what he dreamed when no one else could. Reading some words on a wall written by God would, then, be no problem, but the godless king would not connect all the dots of Daniel's former divinely empowered exploits. Like a fool, he stood before a holy man and a holy God and mocked both of them even in the face of the divine hand of God!

Five, King Belshazzar, a control freak to the core, stupidly thought he could actually control the interpretation by offering this old man power, position, and wealth. Such is nature of our Christless world. Not wanting to hear from God, they will go to great lengths to shut down that voice by any means possible. He should have said, "Since you can ..." His statement simply reveals that he, unlike his grandfather, had absolutely no intention of listening to God ... no matter what God did to arrest his drunken attention. Pride blinds completely, doesn't it?

What do we learn from Belshazzar's bizarre behavior? Just that. As our nation and/or people continue to embrace greater levels of moral and spiritual darkness, causing even more erosion to occur, anticipate a stiffer, more overt opposition to the distinctiveness of your Christian life, witness, and words. Yes, some will turn and follow the Savior; however, by and large, realize there comes the time when erosion is complete and divine judgment is then unleashed ... and warranted. Don't be discouraged. Stand your ground. Live a godly life. Hold sinners accountable for their sin. Address sin as sin. And don't be afraid of the Belshazzar-types who will ramp up their anti-God, anti-Christian behavior so they can enjoy their sin for just a little while longer. In the final analysis, the words written by the hand of God will be fulfilled regardless of man's vacuous, vain thinking. God will judge unchecked sin and in the end He will rule and reign, as we shall see in Daniel 7.

Dark days do reveal distinctions. Those distinctions are, at times, believers who truly stand out from the carnal crowd. Daniel is an illustration of this. Those distinctions are, at other times, illustrated in the penchant for non-Christians to take their verbal hatred of God and God's people to whole new levels. We see this concept rearing its ugly head more and more every day in our version of Babylon. What should we do? We should consider the third distinctive we will introduce in this study and then dig into deeper in our next study.

Bold believers will speak up (Daniel 5:17). Study Daniel's magnificent Christian walk and learn.

¹⁷Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.

“Then,” בְּאֵינָן (be’ēdayin) in Hebrew is highly emphatic. Old Daniel did not blink in the face of such a vile, godless, disrespectful man. With this opening word he let the king know he could care less about his “amazing” offer and that he could not be bought off or bribed. He was God’s man, he always had been, and he would unflinchingly give the king the full, unadulterated translation of God’s final words to him and his empire.

What boldness!

What courage!

What a distinct statement in a dark day!

When God puts you before a king in the middle of the night, will you stand up and say what needs saying? Right now God is working to prepare you for the moment. All the hardness and opposition you feel are merely tools being used by Him to shape and hone you so you are ready for the moment to address those who are causing either massive national or personal erosion.

The tree is about to fall into the canyon, but you are called to be God’s Daniel. The room is quiet. All eyes are fixed on you. The Queen Mother has spoken her peace. Now it is time to give God’s Word to those who desperately need it. Will you deliver? Martin Luther did in his day. So, too, did Jonathan Edwards, and a host of many other Daniel-types. You and I are next.