

# GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

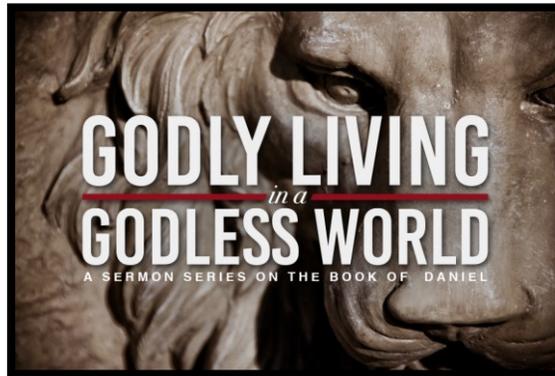
## Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 5:2-5

Written By

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Sometimes the idea of one man starts a trend unravels the morality, civility and tranquility of entire nations. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a young Swiss-born philosopher, had such an idea: “If human nature is essentially good, if evil and corruption are created by a false and hypocritical society, then throw off the restraints of civilization and explore your natural, spontaneous self—the true self that underlies social forms. Free it from stultifying pressures to conform.”<sup>1</sup> For the starry-eyed philosopher, the source of that slavish, restraining pressure was society as held together by the family, the church, class, and the local community.

Deconstruct these unnecessary restraints for the sake of freedom, and people would logically come to know and depend on the wonderful power of the State. As Rousseau once remarked, “Each citizen would then be completely independent of all his fellow men, and absolutely dependent on the state.”<sup>2</sup>

Rousseau’s philosophy appealed to sinful people who wanted to enjoy freedom to be and do what they wanted. Its dark downside can’t be missed, however. When people live without a firm concept of a transcendent God they are responsible to, when they narcissistically live for themselves, doing what makes them feel good, chaos ensues at all levels of society. And that’s when the State steps in to control the chaos with its arrogant, misguided, and godless quest to create a utopian society on the bedrock of relative truth. That’s also when the State, by default, steps in to forcefully silence anyone and everyone who’d dare speak up and out against their

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), 170.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as quoted in Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1990), 127.

supposedly well-meaning moves to create a better world to live in. Robespierre, the French revolutionary, understood Rousseau's logic all too well in 1793. His Reign of Terror, as it is called historically, incarcerated, in one year, some 300,000 priests, politicians, and noble people who opposed the new political order. Some 17,000 French citizens experienced capital punishment for failing to flow with the strong political current to build a new, godless, free society. Countless dictators, from Karl Marx to Saddam Hussein, took Rousseau's logic well beyond anything Robespierre achieved, all in a quest to build their version of a utopian society.

Unfortunately, too many politicians and people in our own country still embrace this pernicious, deadly philosophy. In their desire to live free of moral restraint, to move all of us toward their version of a progressive society through the power of the State, the seeds of persecution and destruction always come in due time. They have to in order for a supposedly better society to prevail over an inferior one. When nations willingly step on this slippery slope, darkness and bondage, not light and freedom will prevail regardless of what their most ardent proponents articulate in the press and in print. I hope you are beginning to understand the gravity of our national situation. I hope you also understand that behind the slide into oblivion started, in part, with one pesky philosophical notion from one dissatisfied Swiss philosopher. Such is how nations die.

Ancient Babylon slid into oblivion over the philosophical notion they were too big to fail, and that their plethora of gods and goddesses, coupled with their vast wealth would secure their future. As history shows, they thought wrong. Their sinful, selfish, prideful thinking, like that of Rousseau, cost them dearly for day arrived when the living God finally said, "I've been patient enough!" I trust that we are wiser than the Babylonians. We do, in fact, live in dangerous, morally unchecked days which challenge the holiness of God; however, we can, by God's good grace, slow and even stop our ever-increasing decent into decadence and slavery if we will wrap our minds and hearts around the main exegetical truth from Daniel chapter 5:

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

Live individually based on the philosophy of Rousseau and it might be fun for a while, but eventually the old chickens will come home to roost as your sins start taking a toll on your life. The same holds truth nationally as well. Passionately argue for freedom from restrictive moral chains and from the limitations of the traditional family, while pushing the power of the State to help you achieve your godless philosophy and you will live to see the destruction, not the construction, of a once peace-loving, God-fearing, unified, and prosperous society. In its place will be a society that would make Rousseau blush.

Daniel chapter five is, as I have said, one of the most ominous chapters of the Bible for it records the sudden and catastrophic demise of the once glorious Babylonian empire. Because they, as a people failed to embrace God's miraculous and revelatory moments in and to their culture through the word of Daniel and his three friends, because they lived for themselves, for their wealth, for their power, and for their false gods, God removed them in one evening. Seven steps of their demise can't be missed by the reader and interpreter. I pray we learn from them so we can individually and nationally move in an altogether different direction.

As people and nations careen downhill off the cliff into destruction, what will you tend to see in their costly journey? First,

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

To re-cap. Philosophically, this is simply thinking you can handle whatever it is you are doing, even if it is highly questionable. It is thinking that nothing will happen to you, that you have got this, that you are in control. It is thinking that you are too big, too powerful, and/or to wealthy to fail. If is your thinking, you need to rethink your position for it is far from tenable. No one or no nation is too big to fall and fail.

Second,

## You'll Witness A Desecration (Daniel 5:2-4)

The late Judge Robert Bork breaks this concept down masterfully and shockingly:

“When the object is to attack bourgeois culture by delivering shocks to its standards, and when that culture keeps revising its standards by assimilating each new outrage, it is necessary to keep upping the ante by being ever more shocking. It seems clear, however, that large sections of the bourgeoisie, like drug-resistant bacteria, are approaching a state of being unshockable.”<sup>3</sup>

The process is simple. Shock and awe the moral society with body blows of unthinkable evil and immorality, hit them hard with jaw-dropping acts of outright desecration and once that particular fight is over, you have gained more ground in your quest to build a better, freer society. Who would have ever thought ten years ago our States would be fighting with each other regarding whether a two hundred pound, six foot two man, who feels he is a woman, should or should not have the right to enter the women's bathroom? Folks. It's just purposeful shock and awe designed to move us all toward greater freedom. Right. It's really an outright desecration of God-designed, God-ordered human sexuality.

If anyone understood the power of the desecration of the divine, be what it may, it was King Belshazzar:

<sup>2</sup> When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup> Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which *was* in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

I wonder how many really dumb decisions leaders make while inebriated. Let's suppose Belshazzar, the party boy, was 180 pounds. With three drinks of our type of alcohol, he reached a BAC (Blood Alcohol Count) of .06. What happens at this level of intoxication? Your mood changes. Your rational thinking ability is curtailed. Your judgment and decision making ability is impaired. Belshazzar should have stayed sober, for it might have prolonged his kingdom. Instead, he became intoxicated, and once this occurred his true hatred of the living God of his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, couldn't help but come out in a detestable fashion.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), 130.

Years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah sent word to the exiles in Babylon that God would free them in seventy years.

<sup>1</sup> Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>2</sup> (This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) <sup>3</sup> The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, <sup>4</sup> “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, <sup>5</sup> ‘Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> ‘Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.’ <sup>8</sup> “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. <sup>9</sup> ‘For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD. <sup>10</sup> “For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place (Jeremiah 29).

You need to underscore the fact this letter was sent, first and foremost, to King Nebuchadnezzar. He and every king after him, including Belshazzar, knew that Israel’s God had promised to free them on His timetable. Since Nebuchadnezzar came to power in 605 B.C., and the nation fell in 539 B.C., this means the blow out party occurred only 66 years into the prophecy. What does this mean? As J.A. Thompson’s points out in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Jeremiah*, Jeremiah might have just spoken in a round number.<sup>4</sup> R.K. Harrison, may be more on target when he posits the return in 536 B.C.,<sup>5</sup> or some three years after the nation fell to the Medo-Persians. I opt for this view in light of the fact that the prophecy of the Messiah’s coming in Daniel 9:24-27 was fulfilled to the chronological letter.

Ostensibly, this means King Belshazzar was really full of himself, as a leader. He dared to desecrate the holy vessels of the Temple of God because he erroneously thought even if the Jewish God was God, he still had more time. He thought wrong, didn’t he? His actions are just jaw-dropping and eye-popping. Of all the vessels he and his politicians, soldiers, wives, and concubines could have drunk from, he purposefully chose to publically desecrate the vessels of God. Talk about societal shock and awe.

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<sup>4</sup>J.A. Thompson, *the New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 547.

<sup>5</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), p. 126. For a helpful discussion of the seventy years, see the excursus in Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 27 (Waco, TX: Word, 1995), pp. 73–75.

How did these vessels wind up in Babylon in the first place? Good question. 2 Kings 24 gives us the much needed answer:

<sup>12</sup> Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. <sup>13</sup> He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said (2 Kings 24).

Jeremiah expands the list with this catalogue:

<sup>17</sup> Now the bronze pillars which belonged to the house of the LORD and the stands and the bronze sea, which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried all their bronze to Babylon. <sup>18</sup> They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the pans and all the bronze vessels which were used in temple service. <sup>19</sup> The captain of the guard also took away the bowls, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the pans and the drink offering bowls, what was fine gold and what was fine silver. <sup>20</sup> The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD—the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight. <sup>21</sup> As for the pillars, the height of each pillar was eighteen cubits, and it was twelve cubits in circumference and four fingers in thickness, and hollow. <sup>22</sup> Now a capital of bronze was on it; and the height of each capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the capital all around, all of bronze. And the second pillar was like these, including pomegranates. <sup>23</sup> There were ninety-six exposed pomegranates; all the pomegranates numbered a hundred on the network all around (Jeremiah 52).

All the costly, priceless, and holy components of the once great Temple in Jerusalem were carried off the Babylon, by Nebuchadnezzar, as war trophies to perpetually showcase his militaristic dominance over the known world. Once in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar placed them in one of his temples as educational pieces of his prowess; however, he never went so far as to use them in a drunken party. That debauched desecration came years later through his grandson, Belshazzar.

Belshazzar's drink fest out of the goblets of the Jewish God was completely calculated to denigrate this God and to further solidify the king's power over the people. Their cups were held up in a toast as if to say, "We dare you to judge us, the Babylonians." Folks, let me be candid. A culture is in a self-destruct mode, despite what its leaders, philosophers, entrepreneurs, advisors, and teachers say, when it willfully, strategically, and purposefully starts desecrating the holy things of God. You might need to read that again so it sinks into the soil of your life.

Babylon was not the first kingdom to desecrate that which is holy. Israel went down this road too long before Babylon did, and they, of all people, should have known better. The prophet Ezekiel, sitting in his home in Babylonian captivity around 592 B.C., a group of leaders of Judah came to visit him. While seated before him, the Lord gave him a revelatory word about the conditions of the homeland. Imagine, what God reveals here about Israel's lifestyle

represents the mindset of the people after two Babylonian invasions (605 and 597 B.C.). You would think after an enemy decimated and humiliated you on two separate occasions, you'd turn to God and ask what you needed to do to secure His blessing. They didn't as we shall see from what the prophet states God told him. I don't usually read a text this long, but I have to because it teaches us what happens as a culture goes off the righteous rails:

<sup>1</sup> It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth *day* of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. <sup>2</sup> Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward *there was* the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. <sup>3</sup> He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner *court*, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was *located*. <sup>4</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. <sup>5</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate *was* this idol of jealousy at the entrance. <sup>6</sup> And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations." <sup>7</sup> Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. <sup>8</sup> He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. <sup>9</sup> And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here." <sup>10</sup> So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. <sup>11</sup> Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising. <sup>12</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" <sup>13</sup> And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing." <sup>14</sup> Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which *was* toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. <sup>15</sup> He said to me, "Do you see *this*, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these." <sup>16</sup> Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. <sup>17</sup> He said to me, "Do you see *this*, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig

to their nose.<sup>18</sup> “Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them” (Ezekiel 8).

Permit me to make a few cursory observations about this relevant text.

One, the fire of verse 2 speaks of the divine wrath of God which will be brought to bear against the sin of the nation the Spirit is about to reveal. The point should be well-taken. There is a limit to how much “freedom” God will tolerate from people. He is holy, above all things.

Two, false worship was woven into the worship of the living God. The “image of jealousy,” which was probably an idol of the fertility goddess, Asherah (2 Kings 23:6), was strategically located at the entrance of the north door leading into the Temple area (Ezekiel 8:4). That image, placed in the heart of Israel’s worship, caused God to be righteously jealous because it demonstrated the people were not worshipping Him above all else.

Three, from verses seven through thirteen, the prophet learned there was a secret cult worshipping all kinds of animals within the court of the Temple. They were led by Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan, the same Shaphan who read the book of the Law years earlier under the spiritual revival evidenced through the leadership of King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-11). This, in and of itself, shows the sinful level the people had slipped to. God had many years earlier appointed seventy elders to guard against idolatry (Exodus 24:9-10; Numbers 11:16); however, on the eve of their national destruction, the leaders had thrown God’s ways to the wind and embraced any and all worship. Additionally, they had become so smug in their false teaching and leadership they did not believe God actually saw or cared about what they did. They, obviously, should have thought differently. False worship has a terrible way of blinding you to spiritual truth.

Four, according to verses fourteen and fifteen, the people actually engaged in the worship of Tammuz, the Babylonian god beloved of Ishtar. Scholars are quick to note that with this worship came the basest forms of immorality in the name of worship all in the hopes of moving the gods to giving fertility to your farming ventures.<sup>6</sup>

Fifth, between the porch and the altar (Ezekiel 8:16), which was an extremely holy place to which only the priests of God were allowed, Ezekiel saw twenty-five men worshipping the sun according to the Persian idol mold. These were the priests of Israel who represented the twenty-four Levitical priestly divisions. Even they had embraced false worship. Even they had openly desecrated that which is intrinsically holy. They had completely and willfully turned



<sup>6</sup>Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 52-53.

their backs on the living God for their new and progressive religion and/or philosophy. Times could not have been darker (2 Chronicles 29:6).

Fifth, God finally, after years of flagrant desecration of holy things, announced He would move in definitive judgment (Ezekiel 8:17-18). And judge He did when the Babylonians leveled the nation in 586. Instead of repenting of their sin and finding forgiveness and blessing, they chose to disregard God's ways and words. Finally, God's grace and patience ran out as they collided with His absolute holiness.

I know we are not ancient Israel or Babylon; however, the path they chose, which led them to divine judgment, is the path any nation (or person) can take. It is called desecration of that which is holy and sacred. Once a culture falls to this level, you can know that the end is near and that a new supposedly utopian society will be anything but wonderful. On the contrary it will be intolerant, unloving, brutal, and impatient toward anyone who worships the living God, and it will be one prone to perpetual acts of desecration in order to further their cause.

Unfortunately, our culture hasn't read the divine memo on the danger of desecration. In order to establish their version of a better, freer society, the Rousseau-types among us must desecrate the things of God because it is the things of God, be what they may, which either stand in their way of unrestrained freedom, or they, at least, bother them because those things remind them of God. All of this must, then, be desecrated so man is free to live like he wants and so the State can codify and legally protect his unrestrained behavior. Believe me, barring an outpouring of the Spirit of God and a time of spiritual revival far beyond that of the Great Awakening, this will not end well.

As Belshazzar openly and arrogantly led his nation in outright desecration of the things of God, many in our culture are following his troubling footsteps. How can you not see it?

- The current battle for the bathroom is but a desecration of God's creation of sexuality being composed of two genetic genders.
- Homosexual marriage is but a judicial desecration of God's ordination of one woman to be married to one man as the perfect arrangement for couples.
- The embracing of any and all religions on school campuses, while disparaging and sidelining Christianity at every turn, is an educational desecration of God.
- The tweaking of supposedly biblically based movies, like that of Noah, to portray this godly man in a less than godly fashion, is a desecration of a person God called a just man who lived among an unjust, immoral people (Genesis 6:9).
- The prosecution of Christian business people who are exercising their Constitutional rights and spiritual rights to perform marriages based on the biblical model is yet another instance of overt desecration of the marriage institution created by God.
- The cultic-like zeal by attorneys to expunge Christian emblems from every part of the public sector is a desecration of the things of God.
- The lampooning (just for fun) the God Is Not Dead 2 Christian movie on a recent episode of Saturday Night Live.

- The desire to create laws to prosecute Christians for standing up for their biblical beliefs about a variety of cultural issues is a desecration of the things of God.
- Mark Tushnet, a Harvard law professor, recently said that Christians should be treated like Nazis because they have obviously lost the culture war.<sup>7</sup> Again, how can you not sense the desecration?

The list goes on, but I'm sure you get the point. Our culture is merely following in the footsteps of the Babylonians on the eve of their demise.

What are, as believers, in the living God to do? *Where there is desecration support consecration.* Let me repeat that. *Where there is desecration support consecration.* Ostensibly, this means we cannot and should not waver in our support of that which is holy or sacred, be what it may. We must commit ourselves, as Daniel did, to stand up for the things of God despite the consequences. We must not laugh at or quickly pass over the comments of those who trash God and the ways and teachings of God. We must find ways to speak up and out when desecration is afoot and we know it.

We are, without a doubt, living in a time of where more and more people mock the things of God, when they drink from the golden goblets of God and enjoy the defiling moment. They don't realize it, but just as with Israel and Babylon, there comes a time when God says, "Enough! You have challenged my holiness one too many times."

To stay God's disciplinary hand calls for us to do what I just said. We must vehemently oppose the perpetual degradation of holy things around us (almost on a daily basis), while choosing to cling tightly to all which is holy and sacred. Can God count on you?

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Next week we shall consider this divine premise:

*Desecration of the holy is followed by the divine degradation of the unholy.*

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<sup>7</sup> Bradford Richardson, "Harvard Professor: Start treating Christian Conservatives like Nazis," The Washington Times, May 10, 2016, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/may/10/harvard-professor-start-treating-christians-nazis/>