

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Man for a Time of Crisis, Part 2

Scripture: Daniel 1:1-2

Code: 27-02

Tonight again we come to the book of Daniel and I am anxious to finish our introduction tonight so that we can look forward to getting into the book. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god."

Man faces the inevitable course of sin throughout his history and that is the constant cycle of decaying societies. We are all aware of it, it's been going on since the Fall. The cycle of corruption buries nation after nation while new ones rise from the rubble and become the rubble for the next cycle. Historians like Arnold Toynbee and Eban Caldune, Italian Veco have given to us plenty of information on the cycles of history, the rise and the fall of nation after nation after nation. It's an inevitability in human society. And I really believe in many ways we are seeing in our own nation the decay and the corruption that leads to destruction. You would have to say in looking at the history of America that we've reached the peak and we're on the way down to the inevitable rubble that happens to every society that follows the decadent cycle. About three weeks ago in the September 10 edition of Time magazine there was an editorial on decadence in America written by Lance Morrow. I want to draw some thoughts from that editorial because it speaks so pointedly to the issue.

Listen to what he says as he begins to write. "It was partly the spectacle of western decadence that aroused the Ayatollah Khomeini to orgies of Koranic prescription. Alcohol, music, dancing, mixed bathing all have been curtailed by the Iranian revolution. If Iran has driven out its monarch and given itself over to a purification that demands even the interment of its beer bottles, then by what logic, what punishment and what purification would be sufficient for America? The Ayatollah residing in some American consciences would surely have to plow under not just the beer bottles but an uncomfortably large part of U.S. society itself. Americans face what moral calls a physical violence and spiritual heedlessness that makes them wonder if the entire society is on a steep and terminal incline downward."

Now he defines decadence from the Latin *decadere*, to fall down or away hence to decay. He sees this decadence as having something to do with death. In fact, he calls it a terminal decadence. He suggests that decadence is a collection of symptoms that might suggest a society exhausted and

collapsing like a star as it degenerates toward the white dwarf stage.

Now to be decadent is not just to be corrupt in Morrow's definition and the definition of history. To be decadent is to be terminally corrupt, and if America is decadent then there is a terminal element in this decadence. In other words, it zeroes in on death. Our country has some terrible symptoms of decadence. There's no question about it. Our music, our entertainment, our pleasure madness, our incredible materialism, our self-indulgence, our wild economics all speak of a decadent society.

In the article, Morrow suggest that there are some signs that we might see as indications of our decadence. For example, the Aspen, Colorado fan club that grew up two summers ago to celebrate murderer Ted Bundy with among other things T-shirts that read, "Ted Bundy is a one-night stand." Or the work of photographer Helmut Newton who likes to sell high-fashion clothes with lurid pictures of women posed as killers and victims or trussed up in sadomasochistic paraphernalia. One of his shots shows a woman's head being forced into a toilet bowl.

He talks further about other things such as the Viennese artist Rudolph Schwarzkogler who decided to make a modernistic artistic statement by amputating inch-by-inch his own reproductive capacity while a photographer recorded the process and made it as a work of art. The list would have to mention Keith Richards, a member of the Rolling Stones, who by one account in order to pass a blood test to enter the United States for a concert had a physician drain his entire supply of heroin-tainted blood and replace it with transfusions from more sedate citizens. Some of the sadomasochistic and homosexual bars in New York and San Francisco would indicate to us an amazing amount of decadence.

In a less specialized realm, disco and punk songs like "Bad Girls" and "I want to be sedated" have a decadent ring. In fact, the entire phenomenon of disco, says Morrow, has a certain loathsome glisten to it. Some might list Tiffany's \$2,950 gold ingot wrist watch or a pair of one thousand dollar kidskin and gold shoes or a nineteen hundred dollar dog collar which you could buy at Harrods in London, or Zsa Zsa Gabor's 150 thousand dollar Rolls Royce with its leather-velvet leopard interior and so it goes. Society, says Morrow, fattens its children on junk food and then permits them to be enlisted in pornographic films. The nation is sub-divided into a dozen drug cultures, the alcohol culture, the cocaine culture, the heroin culture, the Valium culture, amphetamine culture and combinations thereof, legal abortions and the pervasive custom of contraception suggest a society so chary of its future that it has lost its will to perpetuate itself. And so says British Christian author Malcolm Muggeridge, "What will make historians laugh at us is how we express our decadence in terms of freedom and humanism. Western society," he says, "suffers from a largely unconscious collective death wish."

Now in all of this, what he is saying is that we are decadent and our decadence has built into it a death wish. It's a terminal disease. Nations normally don't recover from this. In fact, the cycles of

history are starkly repetitive. And I was fascinated in reading Morrow's article to note that while he was discussing the cycles of corrupting nations he only had one nation as an illustration of breaking the cycle, only one nation that really rose from its own ashes and strangely enough he said it was the nation of Israel...Israel. God's people, Israel, came to decadence, to destruction and to death. And yet because of the covenant of their God, they rose from their own ashes to live again even in this very day.

How did Israel break the cycle? How did Israel overcome the corruption? How did they get the way they were even becoming so decadent when all the while they had the trust of the Scriptures, the Word of God? What is the story of Israel? How did it collapse? And how was it restored?

Well, frankly, that story is part and parcel of the life of Daniel. Daniel became God's instrument in the time of Israel's destruction and Daniel became, in a very real sense, one of the tools of Israel's rise again. As we look at the book of Daniel then, tonight, I want us to see it in terms of the decadence of a dying people, most particularly the southern kingdom of Judah.

Judah had been destroyed by Daniel's time, not so much by outward enemies, although they finally did the mop-up operation. But mostly because of internal corruption. Judah became affluent and materialistic. Judah worshiped false gods. Judah had a religion that was external and not internal. Judah had a nation of liars who knew not nor told the truth. Judah felt everybody around them owed them something. Judah began to trust in illicit alliances and increased technology. There was a general apostasy among their political and religious leaders. They pulled the mask over their eyes and said there was peace when there wasn't any peace, tried to kid themselves into thinking everything was fine when it really wasn't. And God swept in in a terrible judgment and the nation was taken captive by the Babylonians. And that was the time for Daniel, God's man for a crisis.

Now as you look at the first two verses we're going to look at five points. We've covered two, we'll cover three more tonight; the places, the period, the person, the punishment and the purpose. These five inter-lap, intertwine and overlap and so we'll kind of interchange our thoughts as we go. And I want you to note the tragic decadence in the nation of Judah that led to their captivity and how Daniel fit into that picture and you'll see it as you go.

Now notice in verse 1 that there are two places mentioned as we saw last time. There's the king of Judah and the king of Babylon. Judah and Babylon really provide the scenario as we begin the book of Daniel. We discussed each. Judah was God's place and Babylon was the devil's place. We would think they had very little in common. Judah was the place where Jerusalem was, the city of God. Babylon was the place of the city of Babylon, the Tower of Babel where all false religion really began. And so you have true religion pitted against false religion, God against Satan. What do these two things have in common? Well God raises up Babylon to be the chastening agency for His people in Israel.

We saw also the period last time. Look at verse 1, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim." And we discussed that in some great detail so we won't go into that again. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah. Now this particular year was the year 605, the first group of people from Judah were taken to captivity in Babylon. And among that first group was a man named Daniel. So it was in this very year, the third year of Jehoiakim, he had one year called the accession year in Babylonian terms, and three years. He had actually been on the throne for four years and at 605 he takes the first group of captives from Judah to Babylon.

Now we mentioned that Jehoiakim was an evil king. Jehoiakim led Israel down a path of disaster. During his reign then the first group were taken captive and the punishment of Judah really began. Now you remember this, in backing up, once the kingdom was united under Saul, under David, and under Solomon, but Solomon lost control of everything at the end of his life and as a result after Solomon the kingdom split. Ten tribes went to the north and two to the south. And you had the Northern Kingdom known as Israel with its capital city of Samaria and you had the Southern Kingdom known as Judah with its capital city Jerusalem. And they were not only split, they were warlike toward each other. Israel seemed to decay faster. In fact, in all the history of the Northern Kingdom there was never so much as one good king. So their slide was fast and by the year 722 Samaria was crushed by the Assyrians and the Northern Kingdom was swept into captivity and the Southern Kingdom alone remained. And the first blow came in 605 and the second blow came in 597 and by 586 B.C. the third and final crushing blow described in 2 Kings 25 took place. Jerusalem was destroyed. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Jews were swept away into captivity and the country was turned into a province of Babylonia.

Now before the final fall in 586, nineteen years before in 605 Daniel was taken captive. And in that first captivity in the reign of Jehoiakim apparently the Babylonians wanted to pick the cream of the crop, some young men that they could use in their government training program. They wanted to pick the very best men to develop them, to train them for usefulness in their country. And so by the time the majority of people arrive in the captivity of 586, Daniel's already been there nineteen years. He's already been well-trained and he's already risen to a place of prominence among the Babylonians so the Jews have their man in the palace and he becomes a key man in what God wants to do with Israel, the people of Judah, in their captivity and in the future. And so last time we covered that, the places and the period and that was just a review.

Let's look thirdly at the punishment. The punishment. The captivity, of course, is a punishment. God is a God of great grace, but ultimately His grace runs its course and when men take a very firm stand in their, in their position against God, He acts in judgment and chastening and punishment and so that's what we see here. Judah had forsaken God's law. In fact, it had gone so far that God realized there wouldn't be any turning back. They were resolutely determined to disobey God. They turned their back on God. And so Isaiah 24:1 says, "Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste

and turns it upside down and scatters abroad the inhabitants thereof and it shall be as with the people so with the priests, as with the servants so with his master, as with the maid so with her mistress, as with the buyer so with the seller, as with the lender so with the borrower, as with the taker of interest so with the giver of interest to him."

In other words, God's going to come in judgment and nobody's social strata is going to be able to affect that. In other words, nobody is going to escape. "The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and fades away. The world languishes and fades away. The haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth is defiled unto the inhabitants thereof because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant therefore hath the curse devoured the earth and they that dwell therein are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned and few men left."

What you have there is a mini-apocalypse. You have a taste of the Tribulation in the Babylonian captivity. And God says to the prophet Isaiah that He's going to come and He's going to make that place an empty place, a languishing place because they have disobeyed God's law, they have broken the covenant and the commandments. They had, of course, ignored the Sabbath. They ignored the Sabbath day and they ignored the Sabbath year. And it always interests me that the Babylonian captivity was seventy-years long and one of the reasons I believe it was a seventy was because that's the number of the Sabbath and I think God was in judgment recovering the Sabbaths that they never gave Him. They had engaged in gross idolatry. Even though they had been repeatedly warned of its consequences, they had turned their backs on God and they worshiped idols. It says in Jeremiah 7:24, "They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart. They went backward and not forward." They retreated to idolatry. "They hearkened not unto Me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck and did worse than their fathers."

And what would be the result? "At the same time, saith the Lord in Jeremiah 8, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of his princes and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves and shall spread them before the sun and the moon and the host of heaven whom they have loved, whom they have served and after whom they have walked and whom they have sought and whom they have worshiped, but shall not be gathered nor be buried. They shall be for refuse upon the face of the earth and death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family who remain in all the places to which I have driven them, saith the Lord of hosts." They have gone into all kinds of pagan idolatry and God says I'm going to put them away in a severe judgment.

Now listen, God says there's going to be judgment on Judah. He waited over a hundred years after He judged Israel in the north, but Judah had progressed a little more slowly in the cycle of terminal decadence. But they were there by 586 and that was the end. But may I hasten to add this less you misunderstand God and His nature. Before judgment ever falls God always warns. God always

warns. That's always the way it is. There will never be, mark this, there will never be in this world a divine judgment that is unexpected or unannounced. God always warns.

In the book of Jonah chapter 3 and verse 5. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them, for word came unto the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne and he laid his robe from him and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his noble saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything. Let them not feed nor drink water but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily to God. Yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands and who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not? And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them and He did it not."

God said I'm going to punish Nineveh. Before I do I'm going to send a prophet. Now He had a hard time getting the prophet to go there. He took a short trip on a long fish but eventually he got turned around in the right direction. And when he finally got to Nineveh and he preached the warning, the whole city repented. God always gives time for repentance. To His own people in Chronicles He says, "If My people which are called by My name shall humble themselves and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, I'll hear them and I'll heal them." God has always been eager to respond. Ezekiel says two times that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked ones.

But Israel in the north would never repent and Judah in the south would never repent even though the warnings were abundant. Now let me just give you an idea. If you were living in Judah at that time in a decadent, descending, corrupting society moving fast toward death these are the warnings you would have seen. Number one, the disaster of the Northern Kingdom. The people in the south were able to see what happened in the north. They could see it. It should have stood as a tremendous warning to them. They had engaged, for example, in...in the north in gross idolatry under Jeroboam I. They had, get this, actually erected the worship of golden calves, a reversion back to the time of the wilderness wandering. They had set up golden calves at two ends of the north at Bethel and Dan. And Bethel means "the house of God." And so at the either ends of the Northern Kingdom they set up the worship of golden calves. And it became a national disgrace and they wouldn't listen to their prophets. They had two wonderful prophets in the north, one by the name of Amos and one by the name of Hosea and they wouldn't listen. And so God stopped speaking and God raised up the merciless Assyrians and in Isaiah 10:5 God says the Assyrians are the rod of My anger and the staff of My indignation. In other words, He used the Assyrians as His weapon to punish Israel.

How did it happen? Well there they were living in the Northern Kingdom. At that time in history around 750 B.C. the Assyrians ruled that part of the world and Babylonia was just a little state in Assyria. And the Assyrians were a ruthless, merciless, wild bunch of people, killers and they ruled and their capital

city was Nineveh. They had a ruler by the name of Tiglath-Pileser, you can spell his name Pul, that's another rendering, Pul. He moved in, according to 2 Kings 15, he moved in and this was the first wave of Assyrian intervention. He moved in to Israel and put them under heavy taxation. It was really intimidation. He said, "You pay me taxes or I'll declare war on you." Discretion being the better part of valor they decided to pay the taxes. But that put them under Assyrian domination.

Following Pul, or Tiglath-Pileser, came another name you might remember Shalmaneser IV, sounds like a lizard but it's not. Shalmaneser IV, now he moved in more directly, not just taxation but he attacked the capital of Israel which was the city of Samaria. And he began the attack and the attack was finalized by the man who followed him and his name was Sargon II, S-a-r-g-o-n, a very famous name in Middle Eastern history. Sargon II who lived from 722 to 705 literally crushed Samaria out of existence and he carried the whole mass of people away. This is the ten tribes. People have wondered, they said, "Does that mean?" and you always hear the phrase, "The ten lost tribes"? Does that mean that we'll never be able to find the people of those tribes again? Well we never know where they went; there is no historical information as to where those ten tribes went. They were amalgamated, they were intermarried, they were lost forever in mixture with the people of that part of the world. But as God would have it, during the time after the split and before the fall of Samaria, during that period of time many of the ten tribe people in the north moved to the south so that the two tribes in the south became sprinkled with people of the ten tribes in the north so that Judah really became, in a sense, representative of all twelve tribes so that in the history of Israel all twelve tribes have still been preserved. And that's very important because in the Tribulation in Revelation 7 it says, "In the end time God is going to take 12,000 from every tribe of Israel to be His witness in the world." The ten lost tribes were lost insofar as the historical identification of those people, but enough of them filtered to the south so that God could preserve every tribal line for the future. But the rest of the captives never returned. They were lost. Israel had sinned away its day of grace. Israel had brought itself to a place of terrible judgment. In fact, Hosea said it well, he said, "Ephraim," and that was his term for the Northern Kingdom, "Ephraim is joined to his idols," and then these terrible words, "let him alone." Let him go, too far gone.

You know what happened? After the Assyrians took over the Northern Kingdom they got to feeling their oats and they got to looking at the Southern Kingdom. Now the Southern Kingdom had a lot to offer. That was a wonderful land. Remember, that was the promised land, rich and fertile and beautiful, productive. And so Sargon kind of got the idea they ought to just go down and take the south while they were at it. Well Sargon died in the battle moving toward Judah, but he was replaced by his son and his son is a very famous name in Middle Eastern history, his name is Sennacherib, Sennacherib. Sennacherib took the invasion into Judah. Now get this, this is around 700 or so, this is a hundred years before they actually go into captivity and already God is warning them by giving them a firsthand look at what it's like to be taken over by some great power. They stood there and watched the Northern Kingdom go into oblivion. And now Sennacherib literally invaded Judah and put a vice grip on Judah.

There was really only one thing that saved Judah from Sennacherib, you know what it was? In the line of bad kings a good one popped up, his name was Hezekiah, Hezekiah. And you know at the time of Hezekiah there was also a good prophet, his name was Isaiah. The good life of Hezekiah, the tears and the prayers of Hezekiah and the life of Isaiah crying out to God in behalf of Judah touched the heart of God and in grace He spared that nation. And you, you have to, you have to remember the story. The Assyrians were moving to destroy Judah and they prayed and God answered and God sent...get this...one angel. You remember that? One angel and he slaughtered 185 thousand Assyrians in one shot. Wow. Those angels are something, 185 thousand Assyrians and Judah was spared. God was gracious.

But do you know something? Archaeologists tell us that even during that time though Judah was spared under Sennacherib, at least 200 thousand people from Judah were taken into Assyrian captivity. So they got a good taste of what judgment was coming, not only from what they saw in the north but what they actually experienced themselves. They had seen tens of thousands of people driven from their homes, deported into foreign lands. And Werner Keller says in his book *The Bible As History*, "The fertile crescent was plowed up, its people tossed about hither and thither, instead of a varied range of races and religions...religions existing side by side, the result was a jumble. All investigation into what became of the ten tribes who had their home there has so far come to nothing," end quote.

You say, "Boy, I'll bet Judah learned their lesson." No, Hezekiah had a son and Hezekiah's son had a name Manasseh and Manasseh was a vile, wretched, idolatrous, grasping, self-centered, evil king who plunged Judah right back into the pit of idolatrous sin. So you know what happened? God says, "Let me warn you again." Sennacherib was followed by another ruler of the Assyrians named Esarhaddon. And Esarhaddon moved in and he forced Manasseh to pay him taxes under the threat of war. Esarhaddon was followed by another man and we mentioned his name last week, Ashurbanipal. He took Manasseh captive, wrapped him in chains and took him away. And all the while God was saying, "This is what it's going to be, people, if you don't repent of your sin."

Well you know something? When Manasseh was dragged away in chains in the midst of his sorrow and captivity and the land without a king, Manasseh got his heart right with God. He got down on his knees and he turned to God and he repented and he reached out to God and God picked him up and restored him and he had the Assyrians bring him back and stick him on his throne. And God again was gracious. Just maybe Manasseh learned finally and maybe the nation will come around. You know something? They never did, following Manasseh again the decline into final oblivion.

There was a second category of warning. Not only the fall of the north and the powerful presence of the Assyrians, but the preaching of the prophets. All through this time of decadence, God had His preachers. You know, in a very real sense I feel that way in America about many men of God who are

standing up in this evil day and saying, "We cannot continue to live like this and avoid the judgment of God. We can't any longer with a clear conscience sing about America as a nation of godly people." Just can't do that. We must speak against this generation, not on its behalf but against it like the prophets. They had some great prophets in those years. There was Isaiah, then there was Micah, then there was Nahum, and later on there was Zephaniah and after him there was Jeremiah and then there was Habakkuk and all of these great prophets of God poured out their hearts and cried out with a message of infinite judgment coming that the people never dreamed. And they had had some pretty good illustrations, but they were so captive to their sin that they never really heard the message. Isaiah said in chapter 6, "Lord, here am I, send me. Send me to tell this people, send me to preach this people...to preach to this people." And he did, spent his life doing it. He said to the Lord, "How long do You want me to preach?" He said, "You just keep preaching till the cities be wasted without inhabitants, till the houses are without man and the land be utterly desolate the Lord remove men far away and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." Just keep preaching till the whole thing crumbles. And the prophets were faithful but the people never really listened. They never really heard the message. They were so wrapped up in their sin, so smug in their self-confidence.

I'm thinking of a verse, I think it's Isaiah 39, "Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, behold the days come that all that is in thine house and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day,'" listen to what Isaiah said 100 years before it happened, "'shall be carried to Babylon, nothing shall be left,' saith the Lord, 'and of thy sons that shall issue from thee whom thou shalt beget shall they take away and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

You mean our best young men, the men of noble birth will be eunuchs, emasculated for the purposes of the ruler of Babylon? That prophecy came to pass in the life of Daniel himself who became that eunuch in the court of Babylon because the people never heard the prophets. They never learned from history and they never listened to prophecy.

There was a third way, I think, God warned them and that was in the revival under Josiah. Josiah reigned for 31 years, having given his heart to God at the age of 15 or 16. He had a father named Amon and a grandfather Manasseh. The vile Manasseh was followed by Amon who was just as bad but here Amon had this young son Josiah who at 15 or 16 gave his heart to God and it was almost as if God said, "You wouldn't see from history what was going to happen, and you wouldn't listen to the prophets preaching a negative message and so I'll give you one other alternative, I'll bring a revival to see if that will change your hearts." And so along came Josiah and he had a prophet on each side of him, Zephaniah and Nahum and they preached and Josiah prayed and he cleaned up the nation. And he brought about a great revival. First of all he said, "Let's repair Solomon's temple." The temple wasn't even of concern to anybody anymore, they had moved completely into idolatry. They were worshiping in the high places, Baal and the like. Josiah said, "Let's redo the temple of Solomon." And as they rebuilt it they discovered the law of God lost in the temple. It's kind of like liberalism today, where the truth of God is lost in the church. And when they found the writing of the Word of God in

the temple as they repaired it, they took it out and they read it and it led to a great revival, a great revival. And in Josiah's time they were having this great revival. And you know what happened? What happened was Ashurbanipal who was ruling the Assyrian Empire that was holding this club over the kingdom of Judah, Ashurbanipal died and then Nabopolassar who was his vice-regent down in Babylon swarmed up and conquered all of Assyria and slaughtered all the Assyrians and oh, it looked so good.

"Boy, just think, we're having a revival. And our greatest enemy, Assyria, is having to fight a civil war against the area of Babylonia and this man is going to conquer the Assyrians. Boy, we're in great shape. The Assyrians are getting their deal and we're having a revival." And it all looked so good.

You know what happened? Josiah died and the revival, like so many revivals, was attached to his personality and when he died, the revival ended. It ended. It had no effect on the nation. Following Josiah were four kings, all evil: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, evil, evil, evil, evil. The revival had no effect. Listen, they never learned from history, and they never listened to prophecy, and they never even responded in the graciousness of God when He brought a revival. People, that's how terminal decadence is. It's irreversible when it reaches its full fury.

God, help us, because that's what I see in America. We haven't learned from history. We don't listen to the prophets and daresay the revival going on today doesn't seem to be having much impact on our country. Amazingly, amazingly, I want you to hear this, Assyria was destroyed by Babylonia. Babylonia then grew to take over that whole part of the world. Habakkuk says that bitter and hasty nation rose up to take the place of

Assyria. Why? Habakkuk 1:12, you want to know why there was a neo-Babylonian Empire? Here it is, God said, "I have ordained them for judgment and established them for correction." Now listen, God allowed the Babylonian Empire to defeat Assyria. You want to hear something fascinating? The Babylonian Empire came into existence just at the time of Israel's captivity and just when Israel was released to go back to the land, it went out of existence. Did you know that the whole neo-Babylonian Empire only last about a hundred years, which is exactly the amount of time from the first captivity of Judah till the final return back to their land. God simply raised up the whole Babylonian Empire as an instrument of judgment. Just as He has raised up the Assyrian Empire as an instrument of judgment against the Northern Kingdom. That nation came and went in a hundred years. And during those hundred years it reached the apex, it became literally the monarch of the world. It was a rod in God's hand. I don't think Nebuchadnezzar had any idea about that but that's the truth because God controls history.

So, the people were taken into captivity. You say, "They must have sinned terribly for God to bring such a horrible judgment." Look at Psalm 78 for a minute. I don't have time to read the whole Psalm, I think it's the best account of captivity that you could possibly read because it approaches it from the

emotions of the people involved. In Psalm 78, and the Psalms, by the way, were written at all different periods of Israel's history, all different periods of Judah's history, as well as the life of David. They were written at all different times to express the emotion of the people and the history of what was going on from a very personal view, not so much the narrative/academic view as that very personal involvement. And here we find the reason God took the Northern Kingdom captive and really they're the same reasons God took the south captive. Verse 10, "They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law. They forgot His works and His wonders He had shown them. Marvelous things did He in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; He made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime He led them with a cloud and at night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against Him by provoking the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking food according to their desire."

In other words, it didn't matter what He did they were so bent on their sin. Verse 22, "They believed not in God and trusted not in His salvation. And though He had commanded the clouds from above and opened the doors of heaven and rained down manna upon them to eat and given them out of the grain of heaven, man did eat angels' food, that's manna, He sent them food to the full, He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens and by His power He brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them like dust and feathered fowls like the sand of the sea." In other words, they got birds every day to eat. And on and on, the whole chapter just telling all that God has done. Verse 41, "Yea they turned back and tested God and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not His hand nor the day when He delivered them from the enemy. How He had wrought His signs in Egypt and His wonders in the field of Zoan." And so it goes, so it goes.

They continued to reject. "God," when He heard this, verse 59, "was angry and greatly abhorred Israel." Verse 61, "He delivered His strength into captivity and His glory. What is His glory? His people into the enemy's hand. He gave His people over also to the sword and was angry with His inheritance. And the fire consumed their young men and their maidens were not given in marriage. Their priests fell by the sword and their widows made no lamentation. Then the Lord awakened as one out of sleep and like a mighty man who shouted by reason of wine and He smote His enemies in the hinder parts. He put them to a perpetual reproach." And there you get into the fact that even though they had gone into captivity, God woke up and brought them back. Great Psalm, a great Psalm.

Listen, Nebuchadnezzar came in 586. He actually arrived in 588, two years before the captivity. And he started his siege. By this time, the people are so sick of hearing Jeremiah, they threw him in a slimy, filthy cistern pit to die. That's his thanks for preaching the truth. And he's languishing in a foul slimy cistern left to die. Finally they decide to release him and in 588 Nebuchadnezzar came and Werner Keller writes this, "The Chaldean divisions of infantry, fast calvary and charioteers smashed

all resistance and conquered city after city sweeping across Judah. Except for the capital of Jerusalem and the frontier fortresses of Lachish and Azekah in the south, the whole land was finally subdued. Azekah fell and then they went for Lachish. And Werner Keller says this, "In 701 B.C. the stormed troops of the king of Assyria had rushed the walls of Lachish with tanks," this is Sennacherib in the past, 140 years before he had rushed with tanks and tanks were, were sort of war machines like chariots with big wheels, it had battering rams. They didn't shoot anything, they just drove piler...pylons right into the walls. But Nebuchadnezzar had a better idea in 588. "Investigation of the stratum," says Keller, "that marked the Babylonian work of destruction produced to Starky's astonishment," and Starky is an archaeologist, "ashes."

In other words, as they studied the archeology around there they discussed the fact that when they got to the level of Jerusalem when it was taken by Nebuchadnezzar they found ashes everywhere. "Ashes," says Keller, "in incredible quantities. Many of the layers of ashes are yards thick and still, it says after 2500 years higher than the remains of the walls are the piles of ashes." We know from archeology that Nebuchadnezzar's engineers were specialists in the art of incendiarism, in other words they were great at setting fires. They were masters at starting great conflagrations and burning whole cities to the ground. Whatever wood they could lay hands on they dragged to the spot, they stripped all the area around Lachish of all of its timber. They piled high the firewood as high as a house outside the walls. They just piled firewood all the way around the city. They hacked down all the olive orchards and they know that because the ashes they have found have masses of charred olive pits. Day and night sheets of flames just continued to leap sky-high and a ring of fire around the city continually, continually, continually. They piled on more and more wood, more and more wood until what happened was the wall became white hot, the stones of the wall were blistering hot and they literally burst and the wall of protection around Lachish crumbled. And all that was left for Nebuchadnezzar was Jerusalem. And they took the whole Babylonian war machine and they directed it at the city of Jerusalem. They couldn't use incendiary technique there because the forests that used to ring Jerusalem were now denuded by past conquerors. And so they just laid siege. Second Kings 25 says the city was besieged under the eleventh year under King Zedekiah.

A couple of verses later in 2 Kings 25 it says, "And the city was broken up and all the men of war fled by night." You know you're in trouble when the army goes out the backdoor. And that's what happened. They took Zedekiah, the last king, and they did what was customary to do in those days, to those who committed treason they took a hot sword and they burned out both his eyes. But before they did that they lined up all of Zedekiah's children and they slaughtered them and instantly after that burned out his eyes so that the last image he would ever remember would be the slaughter of his children. That was their way of punishing treason.

By the way, I had in looking Werner Keller's book *The Bible Is History* this week they had a picture of a relief found on a wall in archeological diggings of that very thing going on. A king kneeling on the ground and a sword being pushed into his eyes. They also showed people with rings in their lips

because the prophets had said they would take them into captivity by hooks. And one of the ways they humiliated and dragged prisoners away was by putting rings in their lips and tying them to ropes and pulling them along by their lips. The land then became a Babylonian province. They put a puppet ruler in there by the name of Gedaliah who didn't last very long because some pro-Judah renegades who had hidden out in the hills came down and slaughtered him. A group of Jews trying to escape from all of the hassles ran to Egypt and they dragged Jeremiah with them and dear old, bless his heart, Jeremiah died alone in Egypt. And the curtain of history came down on an empty, barren devastated land and now all of the people of Israel were scattered the four winds.

Werner Keller says, "Six hundred and fifty years after the children of Israel had under Joshua set foot on the promised land there was not one of their descendants still in it." Six hundred and fifty years later they were all gone.

The prophetic threats and warnings had been fulfilled, the judgment of God which had been proclaimed had come on them. Jeremiah said, "Behold, saith the Lord, I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant," Jeremiah 34:22. And the story of the children of Israel is at an end and the story of the Jews begins.

Now our scene shifts to Babylon because there's nothing left to look at in Judah. What's it like in Babylon? Imagine you were dragged off and you're there, what was their attitude? Turn to Psalm 137 and let's hear a Psalm that expresses their emotion. Psalm 137, this is the cry of their hearts in Babylon. Psalm 137, listen, and you have to imagine this in Hebrew because it's in poem form, poetic form and no doubt was chanted in a very mournful dirge-like manner. "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Zion." Zion was their favorite name for their land. "We hung our harps on the willows in the midst thereof, for there they that carried us away captive required of us a song and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? They hung their harps on the willows, there was no song to sing. And then they cried out, "O, if I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taken and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

You want to hear their attitude? "O God, may we never forget our home and, God, may You bring judgment on the people who have done this to us." That's what was coming right out of their hearts. They were broken hearted. You want to know something? They never got the message from history, and they never got the message from prophecy, and they never got the message from revival but, boy, did they get the message in captivity. God, if we ever forget Jerusalem. What do you mean by that? Not just the geography, not just the aesthetics, but all that the worship of Jehovah means in the

city of our God. If we ever forget where we belong may my right hand forget its cunning. And so the Word of the Lord had come to pass which said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

You know, you may think that you can live the way you want to live and God will just kinda pass it by. And maybe you've seen what's happened in history and how other people have gone and you've looked at the cycle of decadence and maybe you're doing some of the same things that others have done, but you don't think it will come your way. You don't think maybe that living the kind of life you live is going to bring the things that's brought to others, and maybe you'll break the path of cycles in history. And maybe you've heard the prophets and you've listened to the preachers of the gospel and you've decided that maybe that's not for you. And maybe you've even seen revival, you've seen people's lives changed and you've seen people fall in love with Christ and their whole destiny time and eternity is immediately transformed and you just kind of shove all that aside. Well, inevitably, inexorably and finally will judgment come. That's the way it is.

A weekly newspaper in the Middle West once printed the letter of an atheist who in order to disprove the beliefs of his Christian neighbors had devoted a certain portion of his land to corn. And he decided to do every bit of work on that section on Sunday just to show you could violate the Lord's day and you could still grow good corn. And now, he wrote in this article in the paper, "I find that in September I have more bushels of corn per acre on that part of my land worked exclusively on Sunday than my neighbors have on their land which they didn't work on Sunday. Doesn't that prove there's no God?" The editor had an interesting answer. He said, "No, it doesn't prove there's no God, it simply proves that God doesn't always settle His accounts in September."

Will you look with me for a moment at Daniel chapter 1 again and just a note? Verse 2, "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, because Nebuchadnezzar could never have done it if God hadn't raised that nation up as the rod of His anger. "And when Nebuchadnezzar went in the first captivity in 605," Oh this one in which Daniel speaks, "he took with him part of the vessels of the house of God and he took them to the land of Shinar," which is the ancient name of Babylonia, "to the house of his god," who was, I'm sure, the god known as Marduk. It's very hard when you study pagan idolatry to keep gods clear because they often interchange their names, their personalities, their sexes and everything and there's so many different names, but Marduk seems to be the major god of this time of Babylonian history and the one to which Nebuchadnezzar would worship. And so he takes the vessels of the house of God that would be the lovely things that Solomon had put there for all of the articles of worship and all of these beautiful treasures he took to the house of his god. Why? Because it was a tremendous thing when you conquered a nation to go in and loot the house of their god and if you came back alive, your people were convinced that your god had overpowered their god. And so it was a great sign of security and confidence. And so a conqueror would want to bring back the artifacts of worship from another country to show the impotence of that god to defend his people and even to keep them from stealing from his own treasure house. And so they went into captivity.

But listen, as Lance Morrow said in his article in Time magazine, "There's only one nation in history that ever rose from their own ashes and that's this nation and they'll be back." And one of the reasons they'll be back among others is because of a man named Daniel, God's man for a very special time. And that brings me to the fourth point and I'm going to touch it very briefly 'cause we'll see it in the book: the places, the period, the punishment and the person.

Notice you don't even see his name in the first two verses, not at all. His name doesn't appear until verse 6. "Among these were the children of Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." And those three guys got their names changed to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Babylonian names. But you meet Daniel. God always has His man, doesn't He? Daniel was born in 625 B.C. about, he was born, by the way, at the very year of the birth of a Neo-Babylonian Empire. He was a child of royalty, of kingly nobility. He was a man of tremendous capability and talent and character. Apparently the revival under Josiah really touched his life and though the revival under Josiah didn't do a lot for the country, it did a lot for him, a lot for him. He was committed to loving and obeying God and that dear man right on through the whole captivity, right on through the fullness of the seventy years, and by the way, he even went past the captivity a few years into the reign of the Mede king Darius. So he was way up there in years. Through that whole time he never defected, he never compromised, he never took a step out of the will of God. He stood for truth and honorable character in accord with the standards of his God. He becomes for us a tremendous example.

Eight years later when the second little group went into captivity in 597, they had a pretty nice young fellow with them, his name was Ezekiel. And Ezekiel was a priest, a young priest. He also had superior gifts. And no doubt, people like Daniel and Ezekiel were chosen because they stood out in their society and the Babylonians were smart enough to go after them. And the reason I bring Ezekiel up is this, you know it's easy to look backwards and say, "Oh, So-and-so was so great, I remember the greats of the past. Where are the great men? They're all dead." You know, and we don't like to assign anybody greatness in our day, right? We like all the great people to be dead, in the past. But when Ezekiel wrote the book of Ezekiel, three times he mentioned Daniel. And when he mentioned Daniel he mentioned the fact that if there were three righteous men, Noah...no...yes, Noah, Daniel and Job.

Now I want you to know something. When somebody puts a contemporary in that category, he must be something to write about. And so it was with Daniel. By the way, when Ezekiel wrote Daniel would have been about 50 years old and Ezekiel says he's one of the godliest men that ever lived and Ezekiel says in chapter 28 he's one of the wisest men that ever graced the earth. Oh, he was some man. And the character of his life is literally overwhelming. The Bible tells us he was a man of tremendous courage, tremendous courage. He was a man of fearless spiritual commitment. He was a man who could never be bought with money and never be corrupted with power. He was a man who prayed constantly. He was a man who was loved by God and everybody who knew him. He was a

man of confidence. He was a man of hope. And, believe me, he was a man for a crisis if ever there was a man. God, help us to have some Daniels in our day.

In Daniel 6 verse 4, "Then the presidents and the princes in Babylon sought to find occasion against Daniel." They wanted to find something against him. "But they could find no occasion nor fault for as much as he was faithful neither was there any error or fault found in him. And they said, 'We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'" The only thing bad about this guy is he never violates the law of his God. What a man. They had scrutinized his life for years and years and years and years and never found anything. Now that's man the way God wants man to be, a man for a crisis. Born to rule, he became a servant of a pagan king, he was made a eunuch in the court of Babylon, a dry tree with no hope for posterity and yet he was God's man in a pagan world. He set an example of virtue and godliness that maybe doesn't have an equal.

So we see the places, the period, the punishment and the person, and, lastly, and very quickly, the purpose. Why did God take Israel to captivity? Why did God raise up Babylon? Just going to give you some quick ones, so listen. Number one, to manifest His sovereignty. If the book of Daniel teaches you anything, it will teach you who is running human history. I mean, you're going to get that loud and clear. God raises up the Assyrians and puts them down. God raises up the Babylonians and puts them down. God raises up Nebuchadnezzar and puts him down. God raises up Cyrus and has him do what He wants. God literally controls human history. God called Nebuchadnezzar "My servant," what a statement. And that's the same word ebad in the Hebrew that's used of David in the Psalms and in Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 52, it is used of the Messiah. He is as much the servant of God as anyone. Why? Because he does God's bidding even though it be unwilling and he thinks himself independent.

In Jeremiah 27 God says Nebuchadnezzar was placed in power by Me. And the one great lesson you're going to see in Daniel is that God runs human history. And you're going to see it not only then, but you're going to see the plan for history until the very end of history as Daniel lays out the future.

There's a second great lesson here and that is there are terrible results to rejecting God. You're going to see that, too. Whether a nation or an individual, when God warns and warns and warns and offers gracious forgiveness and men reject, there is a terrible judgment. Rudyard Kipling even saw that when he wrote, "Far called our navies melt away on dune and headland sinks the fire, lo, all our pomp of yesterday is one with Nineveh and Tyre. Judge of the nations, spare us yet, lest we forget, lest we forget." How easy for men to forget that God has judged in the past and will judge again.

Thirdly, the captivity was not only to teach the sovereignty of God and the results of rejecting Him, but to purge His people. You know, there were five good things that came out of the captivity. I'm just excited to give you these and then I'm going to quit. First, you know Israel was never again idolatrous? Do you know that since the time they came back from captivity Israel has never been

idolatrous? It is absolutely unthinkable, heinous, horrifying to imagine a Jew in our society even today who worshiped an idol. They wouldn't do it. Why in the day of Jesus when Pilate came into town with flags with pictures of Caesar on them, they threatened to take his life. Idolatry was once and for all rooted out of Israel in the captivity.

Secondly, the synagogues were born. When they didn't have a temple, communities of believers grew up, the faithful, the saints. And they became the model for the church that meets in communities of believers today.

Thirdly, it was in the captivity that the Old Testament Scripture was brought together and canonized by men like Ezra.

So, you see, in captivity idolatry was ended, community of believers was established, the canon of Scripture was formed. Fourthly, a remnant returned to reestablish the country and out of that remnant came the seed Messiah.

And finally, because they were dispersed everywhere, they carried the message of God to heathen lands. Daniel preached in Babylon and one day a child was born in Bethlehem and some Magi came from the east, from Babylon, they came to find that baby. You know why? I believe because they knew that was the King of kings because it had been so said by a great man in their history by the name of Daniel.

What did the captivity do then? It purged the people by taking out of them idolatry, by giving birth to the synagogue, by forming the canon of Scripture, by creating a faithful, godly remnant to come back through whom the seed of the Messiah would come and by carrying the knowledge of God to heathen lands.

And so we see in this marvelous book so many great lessons, so many great truths. It's my prayer that Daniel will speak to you, to me in a way that will change our lives. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we know You need people to stand in this corrupt day and set a righteous standard. We know You need people to speak to a condemned world, a chastened world. We know we stand on the edge of stark tragedy. Father, we know it's hard to confront an evil age to preserve a godly seed, so help us to see Daniel as an example for us. As we go through this book, change us, Lord, help us to be more like Daniel was that we might be Your man in the midst of a crisis time, Your woman, Your young person, just the one You need for the hour and the place where You've put us. For the privilege of serving You, we thank You even as Daniel did in Christ's name. Amen.

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