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

Divine Graffiti: The End of an Empire
Scripture: Daniel 5:1-31
Code: 27-13

Tonight we have the privilege of going to the fifth chapter of Daniel, Daniel 5, in our continuing study of this amazing prophet, Daniel, one of the great Hebrew prophets of old. A man whose record of the history of his time is without equal. And by the way, for many years critics attempted to discredit the prophesy of Daniel, to say that it wasn't true, that his history was ill formed and unfounded. Some of the characters that he referred to were just not real but false. Some of the interpretations he gave to the dreams and the visions were those of his own whims.

But after years and years of criticism, archaeology in the last hundred years, the last 50 years, and even later has uncovered evidence, upon evidence, upon evidence that Daniel's prophecy is absolutely accurate. And there have been no contradictions at all found. In fact, from the Babylonian record at the time of Daniel, we have no less than 10,000 fragments to indicate to us the truthfulness of this tremendous prophesy. It is the Word of God and therefore it is true and will become verified by history. And that is, in fact, exactly what has happened.

So when you read Daniel 5, you are reading an eyewitness account of the fall of the Babylonian Empire by one who was a prime minister of that very empire itself. And even though he was a prime minister in a pagan culture, in a pagan society, in a palace of Babylonian monarchs, he never compromised his faith in the true God. And thus, every time he appears on the scene, we find him somehow unrelated to everybody else that's there. He always makes a grand entrance alone, never with the magicians, and soothsayers, and Chaldeans who come to give their human wisdom. And so he is set apart as God's man and the record he has given us is wonderfully true.

As we come to Daniel 5, these 31 amazing and marvelous, insightful verses, we see the end of an empire. In fact, the end of the most glorious empire of the times of the gentiles, the great Babylonian empire. We see the movement from the head of gold as the image in chapter 2 indicated, to the breast and the arms of silver, which indicate the Medo-Persians who followed the Babylonians. This great transition takes place at the close of this, the fifth chapter.

As we begin our study, let me remind you of a verse in Ezekiel 18:20. It says this. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And this chapter is a vivid commentary on that verse. Sin brings death. In the life of an individual and in the life of a nation and an empire.

The Babylonian Empire was once the glorious head of gold. The crown of the times of the gentiles. But it had gradually deteriorated. It had gradually entered a state of debauchery, a state of degeneration. Until the hour of its doom is finally pronounced suddenly and totally and the Medo-Persian army sweeps in. And it is the end of a great and historic era.

This chapter becomes for us a powerful look at what causes the end of an empire. What causes something as great and magnificent, as wealthy and as far reaching, as militarily mighty as the Babylonian Empire to fall? And I believe the message of the chapter speaks directly to us today in 1980 in the United States of America. There's not much to get excited about in America unless you're big on hockey. I'm glad for the victory. But it's amazing to me to see the almost desperate need for something to revel about in the midst of a dying society. If we can't withstand Russia's onslaughts in the Middle East, at least we can slam more pucks into a net than they can.

The first scene in the chapter is an orgy. It is filled with desecration, blasphemy, evil acts. The history would describe for us, but I would not assault your brain with such a description. In the midst of the orgy is the awesome intervention of God who pronounces doom on the whole empire. And in a few hours, that doom comes. And I believe that all civilization follows the very same pattern. It rises to its heights. At its height, it is filled with pride. In the midst of its pride, and self-indulgence, and materialism it begins to descend into degeneration, and debauchery, and evil. And as it descends, it comes closer and closer to its destruction.

In Psalm 9 verse 17, it says, "The wicked shall be turned to hell and all the nations that forget God." The doom of a nation is spelled when it forgets God. So the empire fell. In one night, the end came. And Daniel gives us the record.

Now I want you to look at the chapter in two perspectives. First the account and then the application. First the account, just the historical record, and then its application. And under the account, we've tried to break it down so you can see the flow of the text. First is the scene in verses 1-4. Let's look there.

Verse 1, "Belshazzar, the king, made a great feast to 1,000 of his lords." Stop there. Immediately you're introduced to a name. Belshazzar. This name sets the scene. Who is he? Where did he come from? When did he live? When did he rule? Why did he call this feast? What's going on here?

For years and years, the critic says Daniel is wrong because there is no Belshazzar. There is no historical record of such a man. You can read books in the library today that say that Daniel was wrong because there is no Belshazzar. Until something was found which archaeologists call the Nabonidus cylinder. And it is a record of Belshazzar, just as Daniel said.

He was young, 36 years old about. He was decadent. He was dissolute. He was idolatrous. He was immoral. He was impious. He was unworthy. But he was the ruler who sat in the seat of royalty in Babylon the night it fell.

Now what do we know about him? Piecing together all that we know from archeology, it's not too difficult to come up with a picture. So we can set the scene a little bit. Stick with me and we'll get right to the scene.

Seventy years have passed since Daniel 1. Seventy years since Daniel and his friends were taken captive. Daniel isn't a teenager anymore. He's in his 80s. 23 years have happened since chapter 4 ended. The great breaking of Nebuchadnezzar and his recognition of the true God. So a lot has happened. For one thing, Nebuchadnezzar has died. After 43 years of reigning, seven of them in insanity like an animal, but after 43 years, in 562 B.C., he died.

Now Daniel doesn't record for us anything between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned in verse 37 of chapter 4 and Belshazzar is introduced in chapter 5 and we have nothing in between. But history fills it in for us very clearly. And there are several records of this.

After Nebuchadnezzar died, the empire began to decline. He was followed by his son, whose name was Amel-Marduk. And by the way, these kings have a couple of different names. They seem to be changing names according to whatever gods they identified with. But his name was Amel-Marduk. He was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and he only reigned for two years. And the reason he only reigned for two years was because he was assassinated.

The Bible mentions him as a man named Evil-merodach, who was the same as Amel-Marduk. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 25 and in Jeremiah 52 as one who released Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a place of privilege in the Babylonian court. So he figures in the Biblical record. Amel-Marduk only lasted two years. And as I said, he was assassinated by his own brother-in-law.

His brother-in-law's name was Neriglissar. It sounds like a medicine. But that was his brother-in-law. And he ruled for four years. He is mentioned in Jeremiah 39 under the name of Nergal-sharezer. He was an official under Nebuchadnezzar who apparently was involved in helping Jeremiah be released from prison.

So Amel-Marduk lasted two years. Neriglissar lasted four years. He died and was succeeded by his son. I can't imagine anybody naming his son this, but his little boy, who only reigned nine months and was just a child, was named Labashi-Marduk. Just calling him would be a linguistic problem. Labashi-Marduk only lasted nine months as a little boy because he was beaten to death by conspirators.

And the kingdom kept waning. One of the conspirators appointed Nabonidus as king. And Nabonidus reigned 17 years. And Nabonidus was finally defeated by Cyrus, who was the leader of the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus, who came in and conquered the Babylonian Empire.

Now when Nabonidus was appointed as monarch, he was not related to Nebuchadnezzar so he didn't have a right to the royal line. All of the children who had a right to the royal line had been clubbed to death or assassinated. And the conspirators, one of whom was Nabonidus, appointed him to be the king. And so he was the king.

But he was apparently very intimidated by trying to hold onto that royal position and not being a member of Nebuchadnezzar's family. So as best we can tell, he married either the widow of Nebuchadnezzar or one of his daughters. And therefore, he married into the royal family. And this daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, or more likely one of the widows of Nebuchadnezzar, had a son named Belshazzar. So that Belshazzar was in Nebuchadnezzar's line, a remaining child who had not laid claim to the throne and so had not been assassinated. And so it is most likely then that Nabonidus, in order to secure his position, married into Nebuchadnezzar's family by marrying one of his widows and then adopting the son, Belshazzar.

He was still intimidated, so amazingly he moved the capital, or his palace, or the place of his dwelling clear down to in an area known as Tayma in the middle of Arabia. It was clear across the Arabian Desert from Babylon. Days and days and perhaps weeks to make the journey. And for 14 years of his 17 years, he never set his foot in the city of Babylon. Now in order to hold on to the power in Babylon, he appointed Belshazzar, who had the line of royalty, as co-king, co-regent. So Belshazzar occupied the throne in Babylon and he just went down in Tayma and they took care of him almost like he was in exile.

The amazing thing about Nabonidus is that he was not a bad man, apart from the fact that he worshipped false gods. I mean in character he was not an evil man. He was not murderous as far as we know. He, in fact, was a very deeply religious man. He rebuilt a very special temple to his own god. He rebuilt all kinds of religious centers and religious rites were instituted under his reign. He appears to be a totally non-warring king. He wasn't very interested in that at all.

And by the way, this whole picture has been verified again and again in historic writings. He was probably the most capable king next to Nebuchadnezzar. He came from a priestly lineage. He was a man of peace. He was a man of conviction. He was a man of capability.

But Cyrus, now mark this, Cyrus, the king of the Medes and the Persians, was eating up the world. And the Medes and the Persians were just crawling across the countryside. And they met Nabonidus and his forces outside the city of Babylon, out in the wilderness of the Babylonian Empire. And they

destroyed the whole army of Nabonidus. And they took him captive.

This was in a place called Gorsipa. And Gorsipa is somewhat south of Babylon, maybe 50 miles. That's where the battle happened. And he was taken captive. He was exiled to a special place known as Carmenia until he died. And never again did he see Babylon.

Now mark it, all of this has happened when we begin chapter 5. Nabonidus has been defeated. He has been exiled. The Medes and the Persians literally surround the entire city of Babylon. They're everywhere. And depending on which historian you take, they had already been besieging the city of Babylon either two months, some say, three months, some say, and four months, one historian said. So Belshazzar is in Babylon. And all around his is a siege from the Medes and the Persians who have exiled his adoptive father, destroyed his army, and are doing all they can to cut off the city of Babylon.

Now as you pick up the story in chapter 5, we meet Belshazzar. This adopted son of Nabonidus, the de facto king now who sits on the throne in Babylon. And it says, "He made a great feast to 1,000 of his lords and drank wine before the 1,000." He sat up on an elevated deal where kings would sit and he drank. "Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem that the king and his princes, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them."

Now listen. You will note in that verse that it says Belshazzar tasted the wine and commanded to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple. Now we don't know specifically whether Nebuchadnezzar was his actual father. Probably unlikely. We just don't know. It could be his grandfather. This could be a grandson. Perhaps a daughter rather than a widow. I'm ambivalent at this point because scholars don't agree.

But whether or not he was a son or a grandson, it would be expressed by the term father because in Hebrew, there is no word for grandfather. So whenever you see the concept of father in Hebrew, you have to study the text a little bit to find out specifically what it means. It talks about David being the father of Christ, in a sense, and yet there are all kinds of people in between. When a Hebrew specifically wanted to speak of a grandfather, he had to say father's father, because there was no word for grandfather.

And so this descendent of Nebuchadnezzar, be it a son, a grandson, or perchance a great grandson, we just don't know, made a feast. Now such feasts were common. And I did some reading on this this week and I'm telling you, when they had a feast, man, they had a feast. This one was for 1,000 of his lords. That was small time stuff. That was nothing. For example, the Persian monarchs we know from archaeological discovery were known to dine daily with 15,000 guests at a meal. Now that's a lot of folks.

When Alexander got married, Alexander the Great, he had 10,000 people come to his marriage dinner. You think that's something, Acirbonapal the II, in 879 B.C. archaeologists tell us, threw a banquet including 69,754 guests. And the food, you can't believe it. Describing the dinners of the Persians, Athenacius says in one passage, "1,000 animals are slaughtered daily for the king. These comprise horses, camels, oxen, asses, deer, and most of the smaller animals. Many birds are consumed, including Arabian ostriches, geese, and chickens." They really went for the food.

And so he throws a feast. Now it's hard to conceive that the guy could be that stupid to get a drunken orgy going while his city is enrapt by the Medo-Persians. But Babylon was so formidable. You realize, the city was supposedly 15 miles square, according to Herodotus. Herodotus says that the city was 15 miles square, get this, the walls were 87 feet thick. That's thick, folks. That's about as thick as from where I'm standing to the back of this auditorium. That's a thick wall. You don't burrow through that.

Now listen. The walls were 87 feet thick, 350 feet high. And on top of it and all surrounding Babylon were towers that rose another 100 feet to 450 feet where they could watch what was going on. And there were 100 massive bronze gates. And they had no problem with water because the Euphrates River flowed right through the middle of the city.

What did they have to fear? They had it all going for them. So Belshazzar got up on his deal and sitting up there above all of the 1,000 of his lords that were gathered for the big feast, he started really drinking the wine. And it says in verse 2 that while he tasted the wine, and the implication there is that he became drunk, he called for the gold and silver vessels which his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem.

When Nebuchadnezzar first took captives from Jerusalem, in order to show them that his gods, the gods of Babylon, were more powerful than the God of Israel, he desecrated the temple. He took all of the gold and silver vessels that were in the temple used by the priests, and he hauled them off to Babylon and he put them in a special place in the house of his own deities. This was his way of showing his people that their god was stronger than Israel and showing Israel that their god was stronger, too.

And apparently these vessels had sat in this place all this time. And now Belshazzar, in the midst of his drunken stupor, is going to really mock the God of Israel one great last time. And so he says, "Bring all of that stuff that is representative of the God of Israel and we're gonna drink out of it." An act of desecration and blasphemy openly defying the God of Israel.

Now he wasn't totally uninformed. He knew the God of Israel. He knew history about Nebuchadnezzar. He knew how the God of Israel had made Nebuchadnezzar a raving maniac for seven years. He knew how the God of Israel had been able through Daniel, his prophet, to reveal

dreams and visions. He knew the God of Israel was a great and glorious God. But in the midst of his paganism and folly, he decided to mock this God. And he knew that such an act was totally blasphemous. He knew it.

Later on, when he has a conversation with Daniel in this chapter, he talks to Daniel and he admits who Daniel is. And he knows about Judaism and he knows where Daniel came from. He knew the whole story. This was a flagrant mocking of God. And to make it as blasphemous as possible, he takes those things that came out of the temple of God and he uses them as a part of his drunken debauchery.

He challenged God. And you want to know something? God accepted the challenge. He threw down the gauntlet and so did God. Now I want you to know what happened.

In verse 3, "Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem. And the king, and his princes, and his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold, and silver, and bronze, and iron, and wood, and stone." You see the descending there from the most precious gold down to the most worthless stone.

He says, "All their deities, from the gold ones to the rocks, they praised their gods." They used those utensils set apart for the true God in the worship of false gods. And you could just see the picture. Drunkenness everywhere. An orgy with the concubines, the wives, everyone there being drunken. And in their worship, Canaanites worship very similar to this, in that kind of worship there was sexual atrocities that are beyond description, perversions. You think people today have invented group sex, then you haven't read your history in terms of biblical times. This was all going on. d in the midst of it, the desecration and the mockery of the God of Israel as they used these utensils. Music went along with it, as well. They were all engulfed in an orgy. That's the seen.

Secondly the sign, verse 5. Like a lightening bolt come these words. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand and rode over against the lamp stand upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. And the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

Now imagine this. In the midst of all the revelry, at the same hour, God said, "The cup of wrath is full." As He had said to those at the time of the flood, "My spirit will not always strive with man. My patience is ended." And immediately, and suddenly, and swiftly, when the orgy was at its apex, a hand appeared. Not even a hand, really, but fingers. Just whatever was necessary to hold whatever instrument was used to write, supernaturally. And the drinking, and the singing, and the feasting stopped. And the loud mouths were slammed shut. Deathly silence and fear fell like a pall over the whole group.

And you'll notice it says in verse 5 that it was against the lamp stand, in the place where the lamp stand would be illuminating this wall, that's where the hand or the fingers began to write, where it could be seen best. And by the way, lamp stands were usually placed for the brightest lighting at the point where the king sat because he was the crown of the occasion. It is very likely that as the king sat with the lamp stand in his presence right over his head, those fingers wrote across that plaster wall supernaturally.

The archeologist Koldewey, who excavated Babylon, says that in their excavation of the palace of Babylon from the time of Belshazzar, they have found in the palace a large room, 55 feet wide and 169 feet long. That's a large building. That's larger than this building, maybe a little bit larger. Close to this size. And it had, says Koldewey, it had plaster walls. Isn't that amazing? Just what the Bible said, wrote on the plaster. And the place they found had plaster walls. And it also had, said the archeologist, a niche in one wall where they believe the king sat elevated and with a niche in the wall so he would be central. And so in that very setting came the fingers and they wrote.

Verse 6, "Then the king's countenance was changed and his thoughts troubled him." Now that's a mild statement. The next one helps you to understand how much. "The joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another." His face changed. All of a sudden, the flush red face that's been warmed by the wine, and the drink, and the revelry, and the emotion, and the food, and all the perversion that's going on turns to an ashen white. He is troubled.

He didn't seem to be too troubled by a natural foe outside the gate, but he was pretty well troubled by a supernatural foe inside the palace. Fingers writing on the wall. Sheer terror gripped that man's heart. His face paled. The joints of his loins, literally the word is knots, and it speaks of hip joints or joints of bones, particularly in the loin area would be the hips. All of his strength left and he couldn't stand up and his knees started to collapse.

By the way, Nahum 2:10 uses the same expression, "His knees smote against each other." Now this demonstrates how fearful the man was. He was shaking. But that's prophetic because in Haggai 2:7, God says, "I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come." God shook one nation then and some day, God will shake all the rest of them, too. And there will be a whole lot of rules standing with their knees banging together.

Zephaniah writes about the same thing in the first chapter, of how, "God is going to come some day into this world and there will be a day of wrath, a day of trouble, a day of distress, a day of waste, a desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men that they shall walk like blind men because they've sinned against the Lord. And their blood shall be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. And neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to

deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy and He shall make a speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land." That's the day when Christ returns.

But here is a little preliminary shaking. So the scene and the sign. Thirdly, the shortcoming. Verse 7. Where's he gonna go to get some help? What's he gonna do? "The king cried aloud, screamed at the top of his voice, 'Bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers.'" Now this bunch is still around, folks. They were useless the first two times they were called on in the book of Daniel. But what else can he do? He calls the brain trust.

"And the king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Whosoever shall read this writing and show me its interpretation shall be clothes with scarlet and have a chain of gold about his neck. And shall be the threumvere, the third ruler in the kingdom." Why the third ruler? Because Nabonidus was the first and Belshazzar was the co-regent. And this guy was gonna stand with them even though de facto, Nabonidus was already eliminated. It still had to be acknowledged that he was king.

Now we'll give him the throne equal to us and a gold thing around his neck. And scarlet, or better translated, purple. And so he gives him the biggest incentive he can. Clothed with scarlet means a royal robe. He's offering them royal rank. A chain of gold, that was the highest thing you could give to somebody because it was the most valuable commodity. And to give a chain of gold is the highest honor. And to become the threumvere was to be equal with Nabonidus and Belshazzar. The guy is offering the whole shot.

Verse 8, "Then came in all the king's wise men." And believe it, they couldn't be Humpty Dumpty together there, either. They couldn't read the writing in the first place. They couldn't even read it. People say why? I don't know why. Some people say because God has his own way of curving letters. I don't know that. Maybe He does. Maybe those days, He curved them so nobody could read them. Or maybe they were just blinded by it all. Or maybe they were so drunk, they couldn't see them. I don't know. They couldn't read them. And if they couldn't read them, they certainly couldn't make known to the king the interpretation.

"And then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled and his countenance was changed in him and his lords were perplexed." Apparently he was getting a little bit of relief and the color was returning to his face when he saw them come in and he was gonna feel a little better. But when they came up zero, he went right back to being ashen white again.

Now frankly, folks, it's getting rather ridiculous. Same old song and dance, right? This whole pile of people keeps marching in and every time there's a crisis and march out without an answer. The wisdom of the world is foolishness. No answers are gonna come from them. None. Take all of the brain trust of America or any place else and they can work themselves into a frazzle and they're not

gonna give the right answer to things because the natural man understandeth not the things of God and God is the sovereign who rules history. And you can't interpret it from a humanistic perspective.

By the way, the word perplexed at the end of verse 9 means there was excited movement. There was so much confusion, they were all just jumping, and hopping, and moving around. Because whatever was going on on the wall was still going on. It was still there.

The scene, the sign, the shortcoming, and then the summons. Verse 10. "Now the queen," by the way, this is a most likely reference to Belshazzar's mother. The queen mother. The dowager queen. Because the wives and the concubines were already in on the orgy. And because the wife of the king would never have done this. It had to be somebody very stately who just moved in on the scene and by virtue of dignity or whatever had the right. The queen mother. Scholars universally accept the fact that this is the queen mother, the mother of Belshazzar.

"By reason of the words of the kings and the lords came into the banquet house. And the queen spoke and said, 'Oh king, live forever.'" Amenities out of the way. "Let not thy thoughts trouble thee nor let thou countenance be changed. There is a man in thy kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy God." Have you heard that before? Who said that? Nebuchadnezzar did 23 years before, at least. Well, 30 years before if you go before the time of his insanity.

Nebuchadnezzar knew this man Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar called him that. And that's one reason why we believe this woman was a widow or a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar because she remembered the very phrase that Nebuchadnezzar said. "There is a man in whom is the spirit of the holy God." Because the gods of Babylon were not holy. They were just as vile and sinful as men.

"And in the days of your father, light, and understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods was found in him who the king, Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, the king I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers." In other words, the king, and she repeats here, "Father, I say, your father," apparently to emphasize the point that he is related to Nebuchadnezzar, strongly emphasize it. But he was so impressed with this Daniel that he made him the chief of the magicians, the chief of the scholars, the wise men. "For as much as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and revealing of hard sentences or riddles, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel whom the king named Beltashazzar. Now let Daniel be called and he will show the interpretation."

There's the summons. In pops this old queen. In the midst of all this excitement, and perplexity, and chaos, she says, "There's a man in whom is the spirit of the holy God." A statement right out of Daniel 4:8, 9, and 18. A statement made by Nebuchadnezzar. "In him is light." That means enlightenment. Understanding, that means insight. Wisdom, he can apply what he knows. He is the master of the magicians. He has an excellent spirit in knowledge, in understanding.

In other words, she uses every possible noun and descriptive adjective to tell him that this is the most intelligent, gifted, capable man in all of the realm. "He can interpret dreams," verse 12 said. "He can solve riddles." That's what it means, revealing hard sentences. "And he can answer knotty problems, dissolve doubts. Get him. Get him."

Verse 13, "Then was Daniel brought in before the king." Now folks, let me just say this again. It also thrills me that the guy is never hanging around the rest of those people. He never fooled with any of them. He just waits his moment.

He stood alone when he was a teenager. He stood alone when he was a mature man. And now that he is an octogenarian in his 80s, he'll still stand alone. Never a compromise. And he walks in an old man. Daniel enters the scene and we know something's about to happen. Now the king was afraid, but he had to know what the writing on the wall meant.

Verse 13 again, "The king spoke and said to Daniel," this shows you that he knew him. "Are you that Daniel who art of the children of the captivity of Judah whom the king, my father, brought out of Jewry? I've even heard of thee, that the spirit of the god or the gods is in thee and that light, and understanding, and excellent wisdom are found in thee." I know about you, Daniel.

But you know what's interesting? Apparently after Nebuchadnezzar died, Daniel faded away because he had to ask who he was. He had the rank of a prime minister, and yet Belshazzar paid little or no attention to him. Didn't even know who he was. Now he calls him out of oblivion again and says, "Are you the one who was brought of the children of the captivity of Judah by my father? The one who has all of this knowledge, the spirit of the God is in thee? Is this the one?"

Verse 15, "And now the wise men, the astrologers have been brought in before me that they should read this writing and make known unto me the interpretation of it. But they couldn't show the interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of thee that thou can make interpretations and dissolve doubts. Now if thou canst read the writing and make known to me the interpretation of it, thou shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shall be a third ruler in the kingdom."

Now Daniel is not intimidated by this whole deal and nor is he interested in being a third ruler in the kingdom. Who wants to be a third ruler in a kingdom that's got a few hours to last? The higher up you go in the rank, the more likely you are to get killed. He wasn't intimidated by any of these monarchs when he was a teenager and he wasn't about to be intimidated by them in his 80s.

So the scene, the sign, the shortcoming, the summons. And then we find what's the heart of the matter, the sermon. And this is great. The sermon. Verse 17, "Then Daniel answered and said unto

the king." And he doesn't say, "Long live the king." The king is not gonna live long. "He said unto him, 'Let your gifts be to yourself.'" Keep your own stuff or give it to somebody else. Oh, the character and the courage of Daniel. "I don't want your crummy stuff."

What a tremendous need there is for men of the same fearless courage in our day. You know people in our day are seeking with all their might to get somebody rich, and powerful, and famous to lift them up and give them things. And Daniel could have cared less about the whole deal. He was filled with holy zeal. He had no interest in gifts or rewards. He couldn't be bought. He had integrity.

Try to find a man like that in our society. Try to find a man like that in the politics of our society, a man who can't be bought. A man with absolute integrity who has no interest in gifts and rewards. That's Daniel.

He says, "Keep it. I'll read the writing onto the king and I'll make known to him the interpretation." But first, I got a few other things to say. Like all good preachers, he can't give his message 'till he gets his introduction out of the way.

Verse 18, "Oh thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor. And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him." He was great as a monarch. "Whom he would, he slew. And whom he would, he kept alive. And whom he would, he set up. And whom he would, he put down." Absolute dictator.

"And when his heart was lifted up and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne and they took his glory from him. And he was driven from the sons of men and his heart was made like the beasts." In other words, he thought like an animal. In fact, he had lycanthropy. He thought he was an animal.

"And his dwelling was with the wild asses. They fed him with grass like oxen. And his body was wet with the dew of heaven. Until he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men and that he appointed over it whomsoever He will." That man needed to learn who really ran things. It wasn't him. God humbled him.

Nebuchadnezzar had used his God given authority. And great authority was given to him. He had used it to pervert justice. He had used it to kill. He had used it to become proud. And so God struck him down, turned him into an animalistic human who thought that he was a beast who ate grass. And that lasted for seven years of that man's life until he learned that it is the most high that rules in the kingdoms of men and gives them to whosoever He will.

Now from that, he indicts Belshazzar on three counts. Number one, verse 22. "And thou his son, oh Belshazzar, has not humbled thine heart though thou knowest," what? "all this." Indictment number one, you sinned against knowledge. You knew. You knew. You're not ignorant. You can't claim, "I'm just an ignorant pagan. What do I know?"

You have sinned against light. Your sin is not a sin of ignorance. You knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. You knew that he ascribed all things ultimately to the God of heaven. You knew that God broke him and God was demanding to be worshipped. And against that knowledge, you sinned. You know all the facts of Nebuchadnezzar. You failed to heed. You did not humble your heart.

Therefore, your sin is flagrant rebellion against knowledge. A serious sin, people. And I'm telling you, the same is coming from the heart of God to any soul who sits under the gospel of Jesus Christ today and refuses Christ. That is a flagrant sin of rebelling against knowledge, the severest of sins.

"How much greater punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." In other words, how much greater punishment for the one who knows and tramples on that knowledge? He sinned against light.

Christ pronounced horrible judgment in Matthew 11 on the cities, you remember, in Galilee. And He said, "I pronounce this judgment on you. It shall be worse for you than Sodom and Gomorrah because you refused to heed the word and the work that I did in your midst."

Second indictment in verse 23. "But thou has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven and they have brought the vessels of this house before thee and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine from them and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, and bronze, and iron, and wood, and stone. We see not, nor hear, nor know and the god in whose hand thy breath is and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified." Second indictment. You've blasphemed God and worshipped idols. You have sinned against light. And it isn't just the sin of rejection, it is a willful blasphemy. Bad enough to sin against light, but against light to blaspheme.

And then thirdly, the indictment at the end of the verse, idolatry. Sin against knowledge, blasphemy, and idolatry. Listen, it's a progression, isn't it? First, you knew the truth and you turned from it. Then you blasphemed the God of that truth. And then you turned and worshipped false gods. And he indicts him.

Verse 24, "Then was the part of the hand sent from him and this writing was written, 'When God saw you, Belshazzar, when He saw you sin against light, blaspheme His name, express idolatry, then God sent the fingers and God wrote, "It's because of your sin and the sins of your people."'".

So the scene, and the sign, and the shortcoming, and the summons, the sermon, the solution. The solution. Verse 25, "And he solves the mystery of what was written. And this is the writing that was written, 'mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.'" That's what the hand wrote so they could all see. Aramaic is the language. Three words, with the first one repeated.

Mene. Let's see what it means. Verse 26, "This is the interpretation of the thing mene, God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it." Mene means numbered. You want it in the vernacular? Mene meant your number's up. Your number's up. God, who number all kingdoms, says you're finished. And He says it twice. You're number's up. You're number's up. Mene, mene.

Tekel. Verse 27, "Thou art weighed in the balances and are found wanting." The word tekel literally means to be weighed and to be found too light. In those days, when they weighed things, they would put whatever the standard of weight was on one side of the scale and on the other whatever the commodity was, and it had to balance. God's standard is over here. You come up too light. You don't make it. You don't meet the standard. And so you've been weighed in God's balance and you are found too light. Too light in your morality. Too light in your spiritual virtue. Too light in your moral value. You don't balance off with God's standard. You come short.

Finally, the word upharsin or peres. By the way, upharsin, you drop the beginning which is the "u" which means and, and the "in" at the end, which is a plural concept, and you have the same root consonants in the middle. The "p," and the "r," and the "s." Pharsin, phrasa, really, and peres. Basically the same root word, just two different forms of it. It means the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. The root word simply means to divide.

Numbered, numbered, too light, divided. That's the message. The sum of it is simply this. Belshazzar's kingdom is gonna be destroyed. Why? Because it is lacking in moral and spiritual value. It does not meet God's standard. And the encompassing army will absorb it into their larger dominion. The Medes and the Persians. It will divided into the Medes and the Persians, two elements.

The prophecy then written over the head of that king where all could see and the drunken orgy that was going on said this is then end, Belshazzar. This is the end. You know something? Daniel, bless his heart, standing there zeroing in on that king, and I'm sure he said it so that hall literally rang with his words. While he was saying that, you know what was going on?

Herodotus, the historian, tells us this. "The Medes and the Persians outside the city in the night in which Belshazzar had his feast," and by the way, the night is marked for all history. The 16thday of Tishri, 539 B.C., in October, around the 11thor 12thof that year by our months, that night.

The Medes and the Persians built a dam on the Euphrates. It flowed under the wall of the city. They diverted all of that water coming into the Euphrates except a little shallow portion. They diverted it into a swampland. And when the water began to fall in the midst of the banquet, it came down to be about to the knees of the waste of the soldiers. They marched underneath the wall on that shallow riverbed. Went on to the inside, killed the guards, threw open the gates, and the whole Medo-Persian army descended on that city in one fell swoop.

What happened? Verse 29, the sequel. "Then commanded Belshazzar and they clothed Daniel with scarlet. They put a chain of gold on his neck. And made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the threumvere in the kingdom." And he could have cared less. But that's not all that happened. Like a shot, "In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans," what? "Slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom."

Listen. It all came to a fast end. Babylon is fallen, is fallen. Why? Because of sin. Now stay with me. I want you to hear what I have to say as I close. Babylon fell on the 16th day of Tishri in the year 539 B.C. And some day, some day, the Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18, the final world system of anti-Christ, is gonna fall in a holocaust infinitely greater than this one. But between the Babylon of old and the Babylon of the future, nations keep falling all along the history of man. And they fall for the very same reasons that Babylon fell.

I believe that all of the elements of rejecting God that I see in Babylon, I see also in America. And so as I draw to a conclusion, I want to take you to the thoughts of the application. And I'm just gonna run them by you. How do we apply this to today? What were the devastating sins of Babylon that caused her fall? And I listed them for you and I want to show you how these are the things that I see in our own country. And the doom is inevitable, people, it is inevitable. We have passed the point of no return as a nation.

First of all, verses 1-4. "I see the sin of drunkenness." Do you see it there? When he was drunk, it all really began to happen. Cyrus had hat it all. All except Babylon. And Babylon looked to be unassailable. And so in a drunken stupor of debauchery, they thought themselves impregnable.

By the way, you might like to know that in the same place, in the same city of Babylon, in the very same palace, 200 years later, Alexander the Great, undefeated by all the armies of the world, died in his own vomit in a drunken stupor. It wasn't just Belshazzar. Alcohol has destroyed many rules. It's destroying some in our own country.

Drunkenness. We have millions of drunks in this country. Our leaders are drunken, as well as our people. In the United States, there's a death from auto accidents due to alcohol every 11 minutes and an injury every 18 seconds. We are a drunken nation.

Secondly, pleasure madness. They were having a party while the end of the world was a few hours away. They didn't understand how serious it was. Pleasure mad, crazy about entertainment, wives, and concubines, and sex, and dancing, and drinking, and feeding themselves.

And here we are in the same kind of a condition. Sports, and movies, and TV, and shows, and sex, and restaurants, and on, and on. And we spend billions and billions. As my dad used to say, it could be said of this society merrily we go to hell. Completely freaked on entertainment. The whole country is drowning in pleasure madness, unwilling to face the reality that we are on the brink of doom.

Thirdly, immorality. The worship of the Canaanite gods involved sexual perversion and sexual stimulation that I would not speak of. Archaeologists have discovered artifacts in the digs around Babylon that have engraved on them pornographic pictures from this era. They had their pornography.

But I don't think it could be any worse than what we have in America. I was reading in a magazine about a new movie out called *Caligula*that is so perverted and so sick it is beyond your perception. But millions of dollars were spent to put on the screen filthy, vile acts of sex, and perversion, and masochism, and sadism, that are utterly beyond belief.

They are arguing in the courts that there's nothing wrong with it. It's freedom of expression. I was glad to read in the paper today they kicked that woman out of the Marine Corp for posing nude in *Playboy Magazine*. At least the Marines aren't gonna tolerate somebody doing that.

We're so sin sick and wretched that we've abandoned, deviced, and lust. My little Melinda sitting in the back seat of the car said, "Daddy, we went by a place and we saw a sign on the theater that had three X's. What does that mean?" She puts little X's on the bottom of her letters to me. It means something completely different. Sick society, immoral.

Fourthly, this society was destroyed because of its idolatry. They were worshipping all their manmade gods and blatantly rejecting the true God. There were thousands of deities that cluttered their culture. And we have the same thing. We have zillions of false Christs, false messiahs, religious phonies, cults and occults, gods of sex, and money, and things, and pleasure, and education. And we have literally crowded God out of our whole country, except for vestiges here and there of those who really know Him.

Fifthly, blasphemy. This nation was destroyed because of blasphemy. It wasn't enough to reject a blasphemed God, they mocked God. You can't believe how fearful a thing that is. I couldn't conceive of doing that. And yet we produce movies like *Brian*, which is a spoof on Jesus Christ that makes him into some kind of a clown and superstar. Monty Python's Jesus is a sick joke. Is a sick joke mocking

God. We mock God with our empty prayers before congressional meetings and football games. We mock God with religious charlatans who use His holy name to get rich and fill the needs of their empty egos.

Sixthly, I believe America is characterized like Babylon was of willful rejection. No nation that I know of in the history of the church has had any greater opportunity to hear the gospel than this nation. Isn't that true? It was founded for Christian freedom. We have heard it but we don't care about it. We're not interested. It is a willful rejection.

And over in verses 18-22, Daniel said to Belshazzar, "You know all the facts about how God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar. You know the whole story. And you willingly sin against light." "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin." We got churches all over this country on every block and all the way down the streets of this country. In every little town, there are churches and they are empty, and they are liberal. And schools are pumping out people denying the Word of God supposed to pastor those churches.

We are turning our backs, willfully rejecting the very thing we know to be true. No nation ever had greater opportunity than America. And I'm fast believing that no nation ever turned its back on it, either, as severely as we have. We don't learn anything from history. How foolish.

Seventh, another problem that I see in this particular thing is unrelieved guilt. This country, this Babylonian society was basically ridden with guilt. Because sin brings guilt. And you know what? The king saw the writing on the wall and his countenance was changed. His thoughts were troubled. "And the joints of his loins were loosed," verse 6, "And his knees smashed together." Why?

Now if you and I were here and all of a sudden we saw some writing on the wall, we might say, hey, the Lord is giving a message. But that would only be because we know the Lord and we have a secure heart. But if we were a bunch of ungodly people in the midst of an orgy and supernatural fingers started to write a message, we'd react a little differently. The reason they reacted the way they did was because their guilt convicted them, you see?

We interpret everything that happens to us according to our consciences. And conscience makes a coward of us all. The enemy on the inside condemned them like Adam and Eve. As soon as they sinned, God came along and God said, "Adam. Adam." Normally Adam would have said, "Here I am, Lord. Do you want to have a conversation?" _____. Why? God didn't give away anything in His introduction. But He had it in his heart.

Our nation is so guilt ridden it's unbelievable. We're literally ridden with guilt. Never have there been so many psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, mental illness, alcohol, drugs, misery, sorrow, suicide. It's all over the place. Because we are totally unrelieved in our guilt.

Eighth, America's characterized by greed and impure motives. And that's what was part of the destruction of Babylon. In verse 7, he says, "I'll give you gold, and I'll give you scarlet, and I'll make you the third ruler in the kingdom." And in verse 17, he says it to Daniel. Verse 16, "I'll give you all this stuff." And Daniel says, "I could care less."

But you know something? That's how entire system works. Think about it. The whole American system is based upon greed and selfish motives. Characterized by a lack of honesty, no integrity, all the way from the house on your block to the White House. That's the way it goes. You buy people, don't you? You buy them.

These verses point to a system so corrupt. The king said, boy, if I just give him enough gold, and enough fancy clothes, and a high enough position, they'll tell me what I want to know. Why? Because the whole operation was built on that approach. People didn't speak the truth because it was right. They said what they said when they got what they wanted for it. That's the way the system works today in America. Corruption, greed, impure motives.

Number nine, materialism. And that's the parallel to that same verses. Power was equated with your clothes and your gold. The decadence of living for prestige and riches. I don't think there's ever been a country in the history of the world to know the wealth of America for such a long period of time spread over so many people. There are wealthier people in the Arab states, but the mass of people don't really experience that. We are wealthy and decadent.

Number ten. Another thing that struck me about this was their confidence in human security. Their confidence in human security. Did you notice that they were having this feast because they thought their city was impregnable. What could happen to them?

Now a lot of people have that fortress America concept. Hey, this is America. We can't lose. We're gonna always win. We're impregnable. But we're not gonna get conquered maybe so fast from the outside as we are from the inside. We're corrupted on the inside. We're in the same kind of drunken debauchery. When the enemy is ready to take us, it'll be easy, probably not even with a fight.

One historian says there wasn't even a spear thrown that night in the fall of Babylon. And Belshazzar was systematically executed, as were others. But there was no battle. Just execution. It'll come just so fast. Why? Because they believed their own resources were enough.

It's a form of humanism, people. They forgot that it is the most high God who rules in the kingdom of man. They lifted up themselves against the Lord of heaven. We live in a humanistic day when man says, "I'm the master of my fate. I'm the captain of my soul. I'll decide what's right. I'll do what I choose to do." And humanism has taken the place of God. The ultimate stupidity is to think that we

have the resources in ourselves. We have swallowed Godless, atheistic humanism. Preoccupied with all of our rights instead of God.

Another thing that hit me in this passage that is indicative of a dying society is corrupt leadership. What were all these princes doing getting just as drunk as the king? Corrupt leadership. And all the soothsayers, and the Chaldeans, and the magicians had absolutely no help. They couldn't give them any answers. The whole bunch of them were as drunk, and immoral, and as inept, as everybody else.

The whole thing pictures leaders who are Godless, practical atheists, humanists. Who at the end of their guilt, and lust, and folly, can only brazen it out with the help of alcohol and sex. Oh, when I think about that, I think about our own leaders. Some of them such lascivious, lustful people that were the truth known across America, certainly Christian people would shudder.

Can I throw in another thing? I read one author this week who said one of the problems with Belshazzar was that he wasn't as good as his father. He wasn't as good as his adoptive father, Nabonidus. And he wasn't as good as his father or grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. I told you in our last study that I think Nebuchadnezzar became a believer. Remember that? But there's a big gap from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar. And it illustrated to me the decline of the family. I see that in America, too. Where is the Godly seed? Where is the righteous generation?

A last one. And this is the sum of it. What made Babylon fall? Pride. Verse 22, "You didn't humble your heart. You didn't humble your heart." Pride. Listen to this. "At the feast of Belshazzar and 1,000 of his Lords, while they drank from golden vessels as the book of truth records, in the night, as they reveled in the royal palace hall, they were seized with consternation at the hand upon the wall. See the brave captive Daniel as he stood before the throng and rebuked the haughty monarch for his mighty deeds of wrong. As he read out the writing, it was the doom of one and all, for the kingdom was now finished said the hand upon the wall. See the faith, and zeal, and courage that would dare to do the right which the spirit gave to Daniel this the secret of his might. In his home in Judea, a captive in its hall, he still understood the writing of his God upon the wall."

So our deeds are recorded. There's a hand that's writing now. Sinner, give your heart to Jesus, to His royal mandate vow. For the day is approaching. It must come to one and all when a sinner's condemnation will be written on the wall.

The message that I have for you tonight is this. Sin brings destruction. We started with Ezekiel 18:10. We finished with it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Be it a man, a woman. Be it a nation. Doom is inevitable in the world as it gets worse and worse. The Bible promises that those who put their faith in Jesus Christ shall escape the wrath to come, shall be delivered from the hour of tribulation. Shall be saved from judgment and taken to heaven.

What I ask you is to search your own heart and see that you know Christ. Living in this dying, decadent society in America, the country turning its back on the things of God so blatant and flagrant, we are salt and light. We must come to Christ and stand for truth that others may hear and come to know Him as well. God is not willing that any should perish. It's not his desire. He wants us to come to Him.

It's needful for you in your life, first of all, to come and confess your sin and receive in the Savior. And then for those who know Him, to preach the message of judgment and salvation in Christ from that judgment. The good news that Jesus saves and keeps us from the wrath to come.

If you don't know Christ, right now in your heart, will you invite Him in? Pray a quiet, silent prayer. Take Christ. If you do know Him, reconfirm that you're willing to stand for His truth in this day. Father, bless you for our time tonight. Thank you for the wonderful music, the great joy of fellowship. Lord, I can't express the joy in my heart to see the faithfulness of these people. To be here thrills me Lord, just thrills me. Thank you for bringing them and for their wonderful faithfulness. And for them wanting to open their lives to the conviction of the Word of God. Bless them for it, Lord.

And for one or so who are here tonight and they don't know Jesus Christ, may this be the night they come for forgiveness, for salvation. For those of us who do, Lord, give us a new zeal to preach His truths, to stand against the decay of our time. Boldly and courageously take our stand, for Christ's sake. Amen.

I trust that you'll share this message with others. I believe it's important that our people in our country see that we are paralleling the same track that caused the fall of Babylon. People, it's a great, great, great task, isn't there, ahead of us to reach men and women. God doesn't want the perishing and neither do we. We don't sit back and say, oh, it's inevitable. We go into the highways and byways and compel them to come in. I hope you'll do that.

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