

THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2024

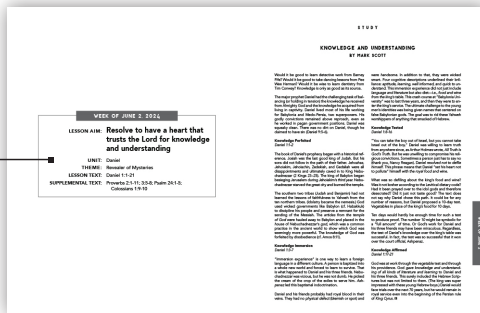
Unit: Daniel

Theme: Revealer of Mysteries

Overview: How does anyone know anything about God? The answer is simple. God must reveal himself. He does this through creation, through people made in his image, through Jesus, and through the Bible. A fundamental assertion of the Bible is that God has made himself known. He has “unveiled” himself. Even in some of Israel’s darkest hours (captivity and exile in Babylon), God was at work to reveal himself. The major prophet Daniel played a significant role in this revelation. In this unit students will learn how God revealed himself through knowledge, visions, and dreams, through miracles, and through historical events.

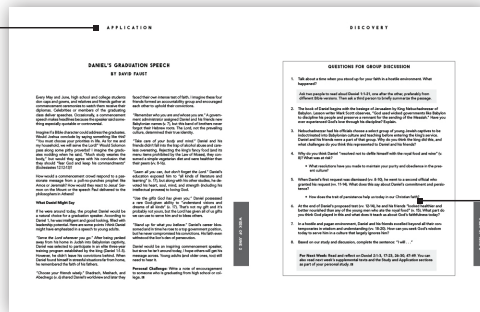
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JUNE 16, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Expect amazing things
from our God.**

UNIT: Daniel

THEME: Revealer of Mysteries

LESSON TEXT: Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 8-28

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Daniel 6:16-28; Matthew 17:19-20; Mark 9:17-29;
Luke 18:24-27

LOOKING IN AMAZEMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

Ancient Babylon must have been an amazing place. It contained the “hanging gardens,” one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Located perhaps in the backdrop of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), it had various trees, shrubs, and vines overhanging a tiered, mud-brick structure. Quite a lush sight in the desert. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar wanted to add to Babylon’s beauty by erecting a statue (of himself?) in the city.

The two central questions concerning this huge statue: *When did Nebuchadnezzar erect it, and when did the events of Daniel 3 take place?* If we read through Daniel from front to back, then the placement of this event seems most odd since Daniel 2 ended with Nebuchadnezzar praising Daniel’s god (2:46-49). Would the king have made an about-face so quickly? Perhaps so; we know Nebuchadnezzar could be unpredictable. The Greek Old Testament (LXX) suggests that this event took place in the 18th year of the king’s reign. But “why” this occurred might be more important than “when” it occurred. Arrogance might be one answer, but creation of the statue could also have been an effort to unify the empire.

Amazing Image

Daniel 3:1, 4-6

The link between the king’s dream (chapter 2) and the large *image of gold* (chapter 3) is convenient. Knowing that the gold portion of the statue is Nebuchadnezzar himself (2:38), the king erected a massive image of gold (form of an idol). It was huge—90 feet high (8 stories) and 9 feet wide. Very imposing. It was placed in *Dura* (dwelling, a plain in Babylon). Archaeologists have uncovered a large square made of brick six miles southwest of Babylon. Could it be the base of the statue?

After the structure was assembled, all the government officials gathered to dedicate the image. The proclamation was part of the dedication. When the music played—at least six different instruments are mentioned—the people were to bow. The punishment for not worshipping was death by fire.

Amazing Courage

Daniel 3:8-18

The proclamation was quickly tested. Certain *astrologers* (perhaps better referred to as “Chaldeans” or “clod breakers”) noticed that many of the Jews did not prostrate themselves when the music played. So, the Jews

were *denounced* (eaten up, devoured, or slandered) by the astrologers. They ultimately “ratted out” the Jews to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel’s three friends were singled out and charged with disobedience. [More than one commentator has suggested that Daniel was on business for the king and absent from the country at this time.]

King Nebuchadnezzar was *furious with rage* (the Hebrew translation means “to the point of shaking”). The king summoned *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego* and asked if the report was true. He reminded them that if they complied with the request, it would be good, but if not, then they would be thrown into the fire. What kind of god could deliver them then?

What follows is one of the most stunning displays of courage in Scripture. The three Hebrews defended themselves without being defensive. They said they did not need to answer the king. Their response was twofold: (1) God could deliver them from the fire and from the king. (2) They would not bow no matter what. In fact, the three words “but if not” have become historically significant and used in other famous courageous moments.

Amazing Deliverance

Daniel 3:19-28

The fury inside Nebuchadnezzar was quickly transferred to the furnace. It was heated *seven times hotter* than normal. We are not told what kind of furnace this was. Furnaces often were heated slowly to prolong the torture. Intense heat, however, would kill someone immediately—as it did to the *soldiers* who threw the Hebrews into the furnace. The three were thrown in clothes and all.

King Nebuchadnezzar soon saw an amazing sight. How the king could have observed this we are not told. He certainly could not have been close to the furnace, so the fourth person the king saw inside it must have been very evident. Was this some divine, preincarnate appearance of Jesus? The language is vague enough to be unclear; the king called this person an *angel*. The king somehow was able to tell the Hebrews to come out of the furnace, and they did. God had protected them to such an extent that no evidence of the fire was on them.

King Nebuchadnezzar was undone by what he witnessed. For a second time, as we read through the book, he praised the *God* of the Hebrews. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego *defied* the king’s commands and were willing to die if need be. There is only one word for that—*amazing*. ■

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IS AHEAD

BY DAVID FAUST

"The only certainty in life is that it is uncertain," wrote Charles Glassman in his book, *Brain Drain*. But wait. The dictionary defines *certainty* as "the firm conviction that something is true, based on evidence." By that definition, I'm certain $2 \times 2 = 4$, the earth isn't flat, and murder isn't right. I'm certain my body needs food, water, and oxygen. I'm certain that unless Christ returns first, I will die someday—and I'll keep paying taxes till that day arrives!

Admittedly, much about the future remains uncertain. "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus taught (Matthew 6:34). We don't know for sure what will happen this week, let alone 10 years or 100 years from now.

Future-angst is widespread these days, and it crosses generational lines. Teens stress-out over college and career choices, senior adults worry about health care, and Americans of all ages worry about the economy and upcoming elections.

Facing the Furnace

A terrifying death sentence awaited Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to worship a tall gold statue he had erected, and when these three God followers bravely refused to comply, the king's temper burned like a superheated furnace. In the region of ancient Babylon, archaeologists have discovered kilns used to make bricks—the very kind of place where the angry monarch threatened to throw anyone who disobeyed his orders.

The future looked grim for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but they never flinched in their devotion to God. They told Nebuchadnezzar, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it. . . . But even if he does not . . . we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18). They believed that *God is able*,

and *God knows best*. In other words, the Lord has the power to deliver his people, but we can trust his wisdom even when no miracle occurs.

Facing the Cross

Fast-forward about six centuries. The disciples didn't know how things would turn out, although Jesus had prepared them for this moment by telling them in advance that he would be betrayed and killed. After the Lord's crucifixion and burial, the disciples were scared, perplexed, and sorrowful. Their faith was being tested by fire of a different kind. The upper room where they huddled felt like a furnace of despair.

During those dark hours, did any of the disciples remember the three brave Jewish men who were tied up and thrown into the fire? I wonder if they recalled how, when Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace, he saw three men walking around "unbound and unharmed" (Daniel 3:25)—safe and free amid the blazing heat—and he saw a fourth man walking in the fire with them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego survived the blazing furnace, and Jesus' resurrection enabled his disciples to survive the fires of fear and doubt.

God won't shelter you from all hardships; but if you go through the fire, you don't have to face it alone. He feels the heat, too. No matter what happens—even when you don't know exactly what lies ahead—you can rely on his power and wisdom. In uncertain times, never lose confidence in God's unchangeable character and "the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4).

Personal Challenge: What "fire" are you currently facing? Thank the Lord that you don't have to go through it alone. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:2-3). **L**

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Share an example of someone who chose to obey God knowing that their decision would cost them dearly.

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 8-28**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. What do you think motivated King Nebuchadnezzar to set up this great statue for all the people to worship (v. 1)? What does this say about the human tendency toward arrogance?
3. Reflecting on the king's dream in chapter 2, lesson writer Mark Scott notes, "Knowing that the gold part of the statue is Nebuchadnezzar himself (2:38), he erected a huge image of gold (form of an idol)." How does Nebuchadnezzar's response to his dream differ from God's purpose of giving him the dream?
 - How can we make sure that we use rightly the gifts and blessings God gives us?
4. It's conceivable that more Jewish captives than Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the king's golden image. Why do you think these three were singled out by the Babylonian astrologers? (v. 12) What does this say about the way some people view those around them who have strong convictions?
5. When confronted by the king about their disobedience, the three Hebrew men refused to defend themselves (v. 16). What can we learn from them about the quiet and firm confidence of those who put their trust in God?
6. When Nebuchadnezzar saw that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were unharmed by the heat of the blazing furnace, he acknowledged their faith and praised God who protected them (v. 28). How can our faith in God today lead others to put their trust in him?
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Daniel 5:1-6, 13-30**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■