

THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2024

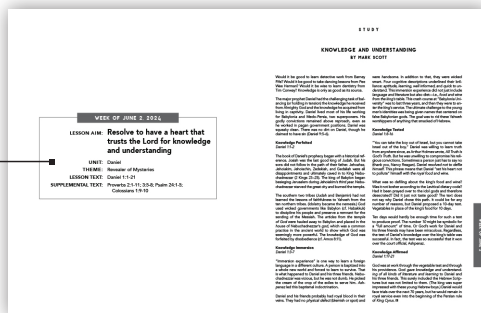
Unit: Daniel

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.

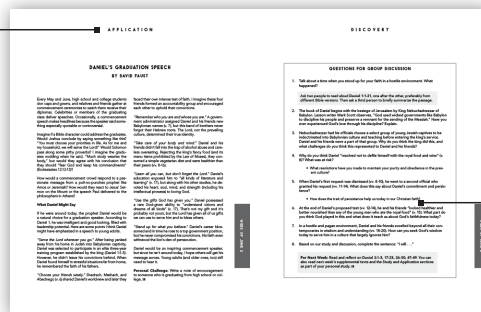
HOW TO USE

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 23, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Exalt and glorify our sovereign God and humble yourself before him.**

UNIT: Daniel

THEME: Revealer of Mysteries

LESSON TEXT: Daniel 5:1-6, 13-30

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Daniel 4:1-17, 24-37; Luke 12:15-21; Acts 12:21-23; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 5:6

REVEALED IN WRITING

BY MARK SCOTT

The Bible is full of arrogant kings. Among them: Pharaoh, Saul, Balak, Sihon, Og, Sennacherib, Xerxes, and Herod. But one of the worst was Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon. The text called Nebuchadnezzar his *father*, but that does not mean his literal father. (Similarly, Scripture said that King Josiah followed in the ways of his father David—2 Kings 22:2—but David was not actually Josiah’s dad.)

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, but the Babylonians did not fall to the Persians until 539 BC. Several kings served in between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, but Belshazzar was in Nebuchadnezzar’s family tree and certainly followed him in terms of his arrogance.

More than 20 years had passed since the events in Daniel 4 happened and the events in Daniel 5 began. Belshazzar was known as the playboy of Babylon. In his drunkenness, he seemed oblivious to the Persians who were right outside of the city of Babylon diverting the river to gain entry into the city. Belshazzar would literally have to face the “handwriting on the wall.”

The Party Stopped*Daniel 5:1-6*

Belshazzar did more than throw a drinking party for his *nobles, wives, and concubines*. He mocked God by bringing in the *gold and silver goblets* that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the temple in Jerusalem when he sacked it in 586 BC, and the revelers then drank wine from them. In the same spirit of “my god is better than your god,” the idolatry was in full swing when the whole party *praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone*.

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall. The word *suddenly* translates from a Hebrew particle which is intended to garner attention. It is hard to think of these fingers in any other way than a miracle sent from God (v. 24). Archaeologists have excavated a large hall with plaster walls that was 55 feet by 165 feet. A room that size could hold many guests. The king reacted to this miracle in four ways. His eyes watched, his face *turned pale* (countenance turned bright), *his legs became weak, and his knees were knocking*. Suddenly the wine didn’t taste so good.

The Prophet Sought*Daniel 5:13-16*

In his panic, Belshazzar called for his wise men to interpret the writing on the wall. He promised riches and

power to the one who could decipher the meaning. The wise men came up empty. The queen mother remembered Daniel and his ability to translate such mysteries.

So, Belshazzar sent for Daniel. He questioned him as to his identity and whether he was one of the exiles brought from Israel. The king promised Daniel what he had promised the other wise men—i.e., royal clothing, gold, and that he would become the *third highest ruler in the kingdom*. (Daniel continued to be promoted in pagan environments.)

The Prophet’s Sermon*Daniel 5:17-23*

Daniel refused the king’s gifts, as he had refused Nebuchadnezzar’s food and wine earlier. But he agreed to interpret the writing. However, first he inserted a sermon . . . and he delivered it straight. Point one: God gave Nebuchadnezzar his power and authority. Point two: The peoples of the earth recognized that power and feared the great king. Point three: Nebuchadnezzar allowed that power to go to his head, so he was *deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory*. Point four: Nebuchadnezzar was made to be like an animal for a period of time—a reference to Daniel 4:31-33—and ultimately humbled himself before *the Most High God*.

Point five was really the invitational appeal: Belshazzar, you had better learn from history and repent. The last king of Babylon did not humble himself. Instead, he treated the temple artifacts as common vessels and worshipped idols.

The Wall’s Script*Daniel 5:24-31*

To bring authority to the sermon, Daniel interpreted the script on the plaster wall. It was only four words: “*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN*.” Belshazzar’s days had been numbered and brought to an end. He had been weighed and come up short. His kingdom would be divided and given to the advancing *Medes and Persians*.

Belshazzar kept his promise to Daniel, giving him royal clothing, gold, and the third highest rank in the kingdom. But the handwriting on the wall came true overnight. The enemy advanced into the seemingly secure city, Belshazzar was killed, and Darius the Mede suddenly was “the new sheriff in town.” ■

APPLICATION

TWO BIG MISTAKES THAT CAN RUIN YOUR LIFE

BY DAVID FAUST

Handwriting on a wall sounds messy—like graffiti that’s hard to remove. Years ago, one of my kids took a permanent marker and drew some creative artwork on our living room wall. It took two coats of paint to cover up the mess.

Teachers write on chalkboards and whiteboards, and business leaders project their notes on screens or walls. But if you “see the handwriting on the wall,” it’s a warning that something difficult, dangerous, or unpleasant will happen soon.

This expression comes from Daniel 5, where an unusual and unexpected handwritten message interrupted the drinking party King Belshazzar threw for a thousand of his nobles. Eerily, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster wall of the palace. None of the king’s advisors could decipher the writing, but Daniel interpreted the four cryptic words (MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN—“numbered, numbered, weighed, divided”) to mean Belshazzar’s days were numbered. God had weighed the king on the scales of justice and found him wanting, so the Babylonian kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

Daniel’s interpretation swiftly proved true. “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom” (Daniel 5:30-31).

The handwriting on the wall brought to light two crucial errors that ruined Belshazzar’s life. He thumbed his nose at God, and he ignored the fact of his approaching death.

Taking God Lightly

When King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem years earlier, he took articles from the Lord’s temple (2 Chronicles 36:7), and Belshazzar treated those holy items like party favors. He and his guests showed brazen disregard for God as they drank from the silver and gold goblets

taken from the temple and “praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (Daniel 5:4).

Love for God includes treating him with reverence and awe. Solomon wrote, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” Paul wrote (Philippians 2:12), and Peter said to live “in reverent fear” (1 Peter 1:17). Reverence is never irrelevant, but irreverence is the spirit of our age. If you want to do something countercultural, respect the Lord’s name, the Lord’s day, the Lord’s table, and the Lord’s church. Don’t take God lightly.

Being Unprepared for Death

Apparently, Belshazzar assumed he had many more years to live. He surely would not have shown such blatant disrespect toward God if he knew he would die that very night. He overestimated his lifespan and underestimated his mortality.

Jesus told a story about a rich man who made the same miscalculation. The fellow accumulated lots of cash, enlarged his real estate holdings, and planned a comfortable retirement, telling himself, “Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (Luke 12:19-20).

We don’t know when we will die. Our lives are like “a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14), so shouldn’t we prepare to meet our Maker? “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23), so shouldn’t that gift stay atop our priorities?

Let’s not repeat Belshazzar’s tragic mistakes.

Personal Challenge: Is your life characterized by “reverent fear” for the heavenly Father (1 Peter 1:17)? How can you harmonize biblical passages about *fearing* God with other verses that talk about *loving* God? ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Without naming names, share examples with your group of someone you know who acted presumptuously and someone who acted humbly.

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 5:1-6, 13-30**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. After naming several arrogant kings in the Bible, lesson writer Mark Scott observed, "But one of the worst was Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon." From Daniel 5, make a list as a group of the ways Belshazzar acted arrogantly. What do you learn from your list?
3. In the middle of his great banquet, Belshazzar ordered that the gold and silver goblets Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought out to his guests and used in their drunken revelry (v. 2). How was this a particular affront to God?
4. What does the handwriting on the wall and the king's response to it (vv. 5-6) teach us about God's honor and his wrath?
5. Even though he was a foreign captive in a pagan land, Daniel was often called into the service of Babylon's kings to help them understand the works and ways of God (vv. 13-16).
 - How can our personal integrity and devotion to God make a difference in our culture today?
6. The king refused to humble himself before God (vv. 22-23) and as Daniel predicted, "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain" (v. 30).
 - Are there areas in your life where you could exercise greater humility?
 - How will you seek to humble yourself before God?
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Daniel 9:1-6, 14-27**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study ■