

THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2024

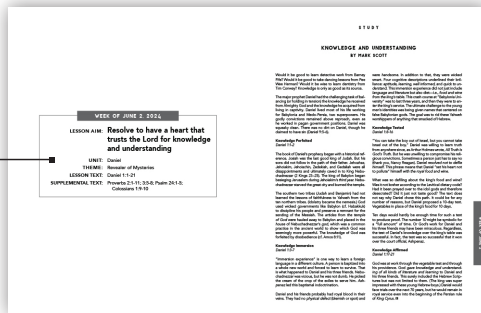
Unit: Daniel

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.

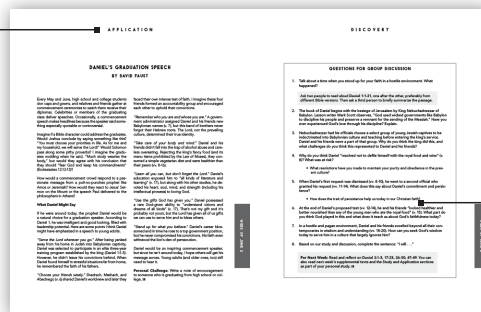
HOW TO USE

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 30, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Pray for insight into God's vast, eternal plan and the part you play in it.**

UNIT: Daniel

THEME: Revealer of Mysteries

LESSON TEXT: Daniel 9:1-6, 14-27

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Daniel 8:1, 15-19, 27; Jeremiah 25:1-14;
Mark 1:14-15; 1 Peter 1:1-12

VISION AND INSIGHT

BY MARK SCOTT

Bible study and prayer go together like peas and carrots (thank you, Forrest Gump). They really do work in tandem like two rowboat oars. Of all the spiritual disciplines, Bible study and prayer must remain at the top. That is especially true when we find ourselves in the latter chapters of the book of Daniel. The content of chapters 7–12 is challenging to say the least. Ongoing study and seeking God in prayer are our best posture for understanding them.

In the first few chapters of Daniel, we learn much about the *Babylonian kingdom*. But in the latter chapters, we learn much about the kingdoms that followed the Chaldeans (e.g., The Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans). We see in Daniel 5:31, 6:1, and 9:1 that *Darius (a Mede by descent)* was in control, having conquered Babylon. But in 7:1 and 8:1, we revert back to the visions Daniel had in the first and third years of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon. And these visions run parallel to the dreams Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2 and 4.

Bible Study and Prayer Grant Vision and Insight*Daniel 9:1-19*

Even though Daniel must have been busy working for his new boss, Darius the Mede, he took time during the first year of Darius's reign to study his Bible (i.e., scroll of Jeremiah). Daniel evidently had been reading what we reference as Jeremiah 25, where the weeping prophet prophesies that the exile would last 70 years. Daniel did the math and realized that the exile was almost concluded—which means Daniel spent almost his entire life in exile, albeit in positions of influence for pagan kings.

Daniel 9 is one of the most penitent prayers in the Bible. It was heartfelt and full of contrition. Daniel's sins are not recorded in Scripture, but the prophet realized he shared in the sins of his people. He was a remarkable leader; God declared that fact through another prophet (see Ezekiel 14:20). The earnestness of Daniel's prayer was seen in the following words: *prayer, petition, fasting, sackcloth, ashes, and confession*. But before interceding for Jerusalem, Daniel leaned heavily into the greatness of God. He acknowledged how great God was and how, in spite of Israel not keeping their end of the covenant, God kept his. He was faithful to his covenant. In addition, God was *righteous*.

Daniel spared no words in his intercessory confession. Consider the following words: *wicked, rebelled, turned away, not listened, not obeyed, sinned, done wrong, and iniquities*. This was truly reality therapy. Daniel admitted that God had every right to punish Israel, bring disaster on them, and make the people of God an object of scorn to the peoples of the earth. He pleaded, nonetheless, out of respect for the veracity of God's name, for the Lord to look with mercy on the *desolate sanctuary* (temple) in Jerusalem and forgive the people. He prayed it with the highest motives—his concern for God's own name.

Vision and Insight Drive Us Back to Bible Study and Prayer*Daniel 9:20-27*

It has been said, "God is rarely early but never late." On this occasion, however, God was speedy in his answer to Daniel's marvelous prayer. God sent Gabriel (one of only two angels named in the Bible) to affirm and encourage Daniel, and to inform him how the future was going to unfold. More than once, Gabriel told Daniel that he was *highly esteemed* (greatly loved).

Gabriel informed Daniel of the future. The question might be: *What future and how far into the future are we looking?* This vision and insight will drive us to study this topic throughout the Bible—and not limit ourselves to just this passage. Here are a few specifics to keep in mind: (1) *Seventy "sevens"* are 490 (years?). (2) Somewhere in those 490 (years?), Jerusalem will be finally atoned for their wickedness. (3) Jerusalem will at some point be restored. (4) At some point, the *Anointed One* will be put to death. (5) Jerusalem will be destroyed yet again.

What does it all predict? Keeping in mind that predictive prophecy is often piecemeal and fragmentary, will some of these events happen early and some happen much later? Possibly—many evangelicals certainly think so. Or could it span the time the exiles return to the rededication of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, to the time of Jesus, and ultimately to the time when Titus, the Roman general, conquered Jerusalem in AD 70, which marked the end of official Judaism? Daniel's vision drives us back to study our Bibles and pray again. ■

APPLICATION

AS SOON AS YOU BEGAN TO PRAY

BY DAVID FAUST

I enjoy walking outdoors, so my daughter bought me a Fitbit. When someone asks, "Are you fit?" I can joke, "Just a bit!" The Fitbit measures the steps I take, the miles I walk, my heart rate, and the number of calories I burn. But it cannot measure my walk with God.

First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray continually." What do you do "continually" in a typical day? Check your e-mail? Look at your cell phone? Grab another cup of coffee? Do you worry continually? If a Fitbit could track your walk with God, what would it record?

Daniel's Spiritual Fitness Strategy

The prophet Daniel faced a lot of stress. He lived in a culture that was hostile to his faith, and he bore heavy responsibilities at work. His career as a government leader skyrocketed until he became "the third highest ruler" in Babylon (Daniel 5:29). Jealous rivals scrutinized his every move and tried to get him in trouble, but "he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent" (6:4). Eventually, his detractors persuaded the king to decree that prayers could be offered only to the king himself. It was an outrageous law, but anyone who dared to break it faced a terrifying death sentence: being torn apart in a lion's den.

When Daniel heard about the king's decree, he didn't panic. He continued the spiritual fitness strategy that had served him well in the past. "He went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (6:10).

Ironically, prayer got Daniel thrown to the lions, but it was prayer that spared his life.

God's Immediate Response

Later, while reading the words of another Hebrew prophet, Daniel realized the Jews' exile in Babylon would last 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10), and that time period now was nearing an end. Deeply moved, Daniel fasted and poured out his heart in prayer, confessing the sins of his people and begging for the Lord to intervene (Daniel 9:4-19).

In response, the Lord sent the angel Gabriel who gave Daniel a vision of the distant future when the Anointed One, the Messiah, would come (9:20-27). Gabriel's message included a line that can encourage anyone who trusts in God—even those of us who struggle with prayer. "As soon as you began to pray," Gabriel said, "a word went out, which I have come to tell you" (9:23, emphasis added).

There is much I don't understand about prayer. I don't know exactly how God weaves our requests into his divine providence. C. S. Lewis suggested that prayer is a way God gives his servants "the dignity of causality." Whether the Father answers our petitions by saying "yes," "no," "wait," or simply "I'm here," we can trust his heart even when we can't trace his hand.

This I know. Communication with God is not only a gift to appreciate; it is an indispensable weapon in the spiritual battles we face.

As soon as Daniel began to pray, the Lord responded. Jesus took this idea a step further and said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). That's why, despite our questions and our spiritual frailty, we should "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

Personal Challenge: How "fit" is your prayer life right now? What steps could you take to improve and deepen your daily communication with the Lord? **L**

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time in your life when you were driven of necessity to Bible study and prayer.

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 9:1-6, 14-27**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. Even as he worked in the service of Babylon's king, Daniel still found time to devote to the study of God's Word (vv. 1-2). What can his example teach us about prioritizing time in the Word even amid demanding responsibilities?
3. What attitudes and actions did Daniel display as he approached God in prayer (v. 3)?
 - What can we learn from this about our own attitudes and actions when we pray?
4. As a group, look closely at Daniel's earnest prayer (vv. 4-19) and answer the following questions:
 - What does Daniel say about God?
 - What does he say about the nation of Israel?
 - What does he say about himself?
 - What does this say about Daniel's own heart?
5. As Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and said, "As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you" (v. 23). What encouragement do you draw from this encounter that helps you when you pray?
6. God answered Daniel's prayer with specific prophecies (vv. 24-27). How do you view their fulfillment and how does this build your trust in God as one who hears and answers prayer?
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Esther 2:5-20** as we begin a unit on the heroic actions of the young Jewish woman who became queen of the Persian empire. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖