



# 1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

## OVERVIEW

### Study: 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 study students will learn how God revealed himself through knowledge, visions, and dreams, through miracles, and through historical events.

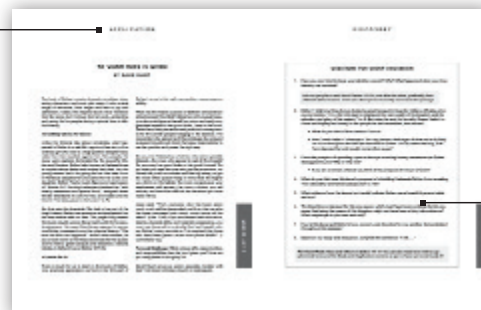
## HOW TO USE

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



**Tab**s 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.

# INTRODUCTION

## Author

Deported to Babylon as teenager, Daniel remained faithful to God and to his Jewish heritage throughout his lifetime. Blessed with wisdom, insight, integrity, and perseverance—along with the God-given ability to interpret dreams and visions—Daniel served in high profile government positions in two major world empires while advising four different kings.

## Audience

Daniel wrote as a prophet of God to remind the people of God, the Jewish nation, that even though they had been conquered by a foreign kingdom, the kingdom and power of the one true God would stand forever. God had a plan to restore his people.

## Date

Daniel's prophetic ministry occurred between 606 and 536 BC.

## Setting

The events in the book of Daniel took place in ancient Babylon during the time of the Babylonian exile.

## Theme

Even as young men, Daniel and his three acquaintances, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (their Babylonian names) remained true to God in a foreign and pagan culture. Far from home and from the godly influence of families and spiritual leaders, they insisted (even when their lives were at stake) on obeying and serving God. The book is historical in nature, but it also contains a strong prophetic element as Daniel recorded dreams and visions related to Israel's future restoration and the coming of the promised Messiah.

## Why Study Daniel?

Daniel's life is a lesson in integrity and faithfulness to God. The theme of God's sovereignty above all nations and all rulers runs throughout the book. It encourages us to live holy lives even in a hostile culture. The prophecies recorded in the book remind us that God is holy, that sin is punishable, and that even in our failures God promises to remain with us and will one day redeem his people forever.

## STUDY CONTENT

- WEEK 1:** Daniel 1:1-21
- WEEK 2:** Daniel 2:1-3, 17-23, 26-30, 47-49
- WEEK 3:** Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 8-28
- WEEK 4:** Daniel 5:1-6, 13-30
- WEEK 5:** Daniel 9:1-6, 14-27

**WEEK ONE**

**LESSON AIM:** **Resolve to have a heart that trusts the Lord for knowledge and understanding.**

**STUDY:** Daniel

**THEME:** Revealer of Mysteries

**LESSON TEXT:** Daniel 1:1-21

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Proverbs 2:1-11; 3:5-8; Psalm 24:1-5, Colossians 1:9-10

## STUDY

# KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

BY MARK SCOTT

Would it be good to learn detective work from Barney Fife? Would it be good to take dancing lessons from Pee Wee Herman? Would it be wise to learn dentistry from Tim Conway? Knowledge is only as good as its source.

The major prophet Daniel had the challenging task of balancing (or holding in tension) the knowledge he received from Almighty God and the knowledge he acquired from living in captivity. Daniel lived most of his life working for Babylonia and Medo-Persia, two superpowers. His godly convictions remained above reproach, even as he worked in pagan government positions. Daniel was squeaky clean. There was no dirt on Daniel, though he claimed to have sin (Daniel 9:5-6).

### Knowledge Forfeited

*Daniel 1:1-2*

The book of Daniel's prophecy began with a historical reference. Josiah was the last good king of Judah. But his sons did not follow in the path of their father. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and Gedaliah were all disappointments and ultimately caved in to King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 23-25). The king of Babylon began besieging Jerusalem during Jehoiakim's third year. Nebuchadnezzar starved the great city and burned the temple.

The southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) had not learned the lessons of faithfulness to Yahweh from the 10 northern tribes. (Idolatry became the nemesis.) God used wicked governments like Babylon (cf. Habakkuk) to discipline his people and preserve a remnant for the sending of the Messiah. The articles from the temple of God were hauled away to Babylon and placed in the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god, which was a common practice in the ancient world to show which God was seemingly more powerful. The knowledge of God was forfeited by disobedience (cf. Amos 8:11).

### Knowledge Immersion

*Daniel 1:3-7*

"Immersion experience" is one way to learn a foreign language in a different culture. A person is baptized into a whole new world and forced to learn to survive. That is what happened to Daniel and his three friends. Nebuchadnezzar was vicious, but he was not dumb. He picked the cream of the crop of the exiles to serve him. Ashpenaz led this baptismal indoctrination.

Daniel and his friends probably had royal blood in their veins. They had no physical defect (blemish or spot) and were handsome (shiny countenance). In addition to that, they were wicked smart. Four cognitive descriptions underlined their brilliance: aptitude, learning, well in-

formed, and quick to understand. This immersion experience did not just include language and literature but also diet—i.e., food and wine from the king's table. This crash course at "Babylonia University" was to last three years, and then they were to enter the king's service. The ultimate challenge to the young men's identities was being given names that centered on false Babylonian gods. The goal was to rid these Yahweh worshipers of anything that smacked of Hebrew.

### Knowledge Tested

*Daniel 1:8-16*

"You can take the boy out of Israel, but you cannot take Israel out of the boy." Daniel was willing to learn truth from anywhere since, as Arthur Holmes wrote, "All truth is God's truth." But he was unwilling to compromise his religious convictions. Sometimes a person just has to say no. Daniel resolved not to defile himself. This phrase means that Daniel "set his heart not to pollute" himself with the royal food and wine.

What was so defiling about the king's food and wine? Was it not kosher according to the Levitical dietary code? Had it been prayed over to the idol gods and therefore desecrated? Did it just not taste good? The text does not say why Daniel chose this path. It could be for any number of reasons, but Daniel proposed a 10-day test. Vegetables in place of the king's food for 10 days.

Ten days would hardly be enough time for such a test to produce proof. The number 10 might be symbolic for a "full amount" of time. Or God's work for Daniel and his three friends may have been miraculous. Regardless, the test of Daniel's knowledge over the king's table was successful. In fact, the test was so successful that it won over the court official, Ashpenaz.

### Knowledge Affirmed

*Daniel 1:17-21*

God was at work through the vegetable test and through his providence. God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning to Daniel and his three friends. This surely included the Hebrew Scriptures but was not limited to them. (The king was super impressed with these young Hebrew boys.) Daniel would face trials over the next 70 years, but he would remain in royal service even into the beginning of the Persian rule of King Cyrus.

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## APPLICATION

### DANIEL'S GRADUATION SPEECH

BY DAVID FAUST

Every year, high school and college students don caps and gowns, and relatives and friends gather at commencement ceremonies to watch them receive their diplomas. Celebrities or members of the graduating class deliver speeches. Occasionally, a commencement speech makes headlines because the speaker said something especially quotable or controversial.

Imagine if a Bible character could address the graduates. Would Joshua conclude by saying something like this? "You must choose your priorities in life. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" Would Solomon pass along some pithy proverbs? I imagine the graduates nodding when he said, "Much study wears the body," but would they agree with his conclusion that they should "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:12-13)?

How would a commencement crowd respond to a passionate message from a pull-no-punches prophet like Amos or Jeremiah? How would they react to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or the speech Paul delivered to the philosophers in Athens?

#### What Daniel Might Say

If he were around today, the prophet Daniel would be a natural choice for a graduation speaker. According to Daniel 1, he was intelligent and good looking, filled with leadership potential. Here are some points I think Daniel might have emphasized in a speech to young adults.

"Serve the Lord wherever you go." After being yanked away from his home in Judah into Babylonian captivity, Daniel was selected to participate in an elite three-year training program established by the king (Daniel 1:1-5). However, he didn't leave his convictions behind. When Daniel found himself in stressful situations far from home, he remembered the faith of his fathers.

"Choose your friends wisely." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v. 6) shared Daniel's worldview and later they faced their own intense test of faith. I imagine

these four friends formed an accountability group and encouraged each other to uphold their convictions.

"Remember who you are and whose you are." A government administrator assigned Daniel and his friends new Babylonian names (v. 7), but this band of brothers never forgot their Hebrew roots. The Lord, not the prevailing culture, determined their true identity.

"Take care of your body and mind." Daniel and his friends didn't fall into the trap of alcohol abuse and careless overeating. Rejecting the king's fancy food (and its menu items prohibited by the Law of Moses), they consumed a simple vegetarian diet and were healthier than their peers (vv. 8-16).

"Learn all you can, but don't forget the Lord." Daniel's education exposed him to "all kinds of literature and learning" (v. 17), but along with his other studies, he devoted his heart, soul, mind, and strength (including his intellectual prowess) to loving God.

"Use the gifts God has given you." Daniel possessed a rare God-given ability to "understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (v. 17). That's not my gift and it's probably not yours, but the Lord has given all of us gifts we can use to serve him and to bless others.

"Stand up for what you believe." Daniel's career blossomed and in time he rose to a top government position, but he never compromised his convictions. His faith even withstood the lions' den of persecution.

Daniel would be an inspiring commencement speaker, but since he isn't around today, I hope others will get his message across. Young adults (and older ones, too) still need to hear it.

#### Personal Challenge:

Write a note of encouragement to a young person who is starting out in life.

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time when you stood up for your faith in a hostile environment. What happened?

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 1:1-21**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. The book of Daniel begins with the besiege of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Lesson writer Mark Scott observes, "God used wicked governments like Babylon to discipline his people and preserve a remnant for the sending of the Messiah." Have you ever experienced God's love through his discipline? Explain.
3. Nebuchadnezzar had his officials choose a select group of young Jewish captives to be indoctrinated into Babylonian culture and teaching before entering the king's service. Daniel and his friends were a part of that group. Why do you think the king did this, and what challenges do you think this represented to Daniel and his friends?
4. Why do you think Daniel "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine" (v. 8)? What was at risk?
  - What resolutions have you made to maintain your purity and obedience in the present culture?
5. When Daniel's first request was dismissed (vv. 8-10), he went to a second official who granted his request (vv. 11-14). What does this say about Daniel's commitment and persistence?
  - How does the trait of persistence help us today in our Christian faith?
6. At the end of Daniel's proposed test (vv. 12-14), he and his friends "looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (v. 15). What part do you think God played in this and what does it teach us about God's faithfulness today?
7. In a hostile and pagan environment, Daniel and his friends excelled beyond all their contemporaries in wisdom and understanding (vv. 18-20). How can you seek God's wisdom today to serve him in a culture that largely ignores him?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Daniel 2:1-3, 17-23, 26-30, 47-49**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

## WEEK TWO

**LESSON AIM:** **Look to God for wisdom  
in all things.**

**STUDY:** Daniel

**THEME:** Revealer of Mysteries

**LESSON TEXT:** Daniel 2:1-3, 17-23, 26-30, 47-49

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Daniel 2:4-16, 24-25, 31-46; Proverbs 2:6; James  
1:5

## DEEP AND HIDDEN THINGS

BY MARK SCOTT

Scholars speak of an apophatic view of God. This sometimes is called negative theology. The idea is that what cannot be known about God is far greater than what can be known. God is so far beyond human understanding that he is indescribable and inconceivable (Romans 11:33-36; 1 Timothy 1:17). Mere human beings should probably not even concern themselves with the deep things of God. Instead, they should be like a weaned child with its mother (Psalm 131).

Some secret things belong to the Lord exclusively (Deuteronomy 29:29). But God has revealed himself. According to Moses, God's specific commands can, in fact, be understood. They are not far off in the heavens or beyond the sea. They are near (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). The prophet Daniel believed that if God revealed the deep and hidden things, then they could be understood.

**Troublesome Dreams**

*Daniel 2:1-3*

In the book of Daniel, as with other prophetic sections of Scripture (e.g., Ezra 4:7-16), certain events might seem out of order. Daniel 1:5 says that Daniel was trained for three years for the king's service. But Daniel 2:1 says it was the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign when the king had his dream and Daniel interpreted it. How can this be? Nebopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, most likely was still king of Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem.

Regardless, early in his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams (visions with prophetic significance). The king's mind was troubled (beaten or disturbed) to the point of insomnia. The king gathered his wise men (magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers—all terms dealing more with the spirit world than modern science). The "catch-22" was that the king wanted these wise men to tell the king his dream and its interpretation. Of course, the wise men objected vigorously to such a request and stalled for time. But the king was resolute to the point that it even endangered the lives of Daniel and his friends.

**Mysteries Revealed**

*Daniel 2:17-23, 26-30*

Daniel informed his friends of the king's request. The four held an earnest prayer meeting. They pleaded for mercy (or compassion) about the king's dream. God answered the prayer during the night. Before Daniel rushed off to tell the king his dream and its interpretation, they praised the real king of the universe for revealing the deep and hidden things.

The praise chorus for God acknowledged his wisdom and power in addition to his sovereignty over seasons and kings. As God brought light out of darkness in creation (Genesis 1:3), so he did in revealing Nebuchadnezzar's secret dream. Notice that verse 21 is stated in first person. Daniel's praise is personal.

Daniel approached Arioch before the commander of the king's guard could kill the wise men of Babylon, and then Daniel was brought to the king. Arioch vetted Daniel while Nebuchadnezzar questioned him. Daniel told the king that no wise man of his kingdom could do what the king wanted done. But God in heaven could reveal the mysteries (secrets). The mysteries had to do with the future.

Verses 31-45 contain the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The imposing figure in the dream was that of a huge statue. The head was made of gold, the chest and arms were made of silver, the middle and thighs were made of bronze, and the feet were made of a combination of iron and clay. It looked powerful. But then a strange and unique stone slammed into the statue at its feet and smashed it. The statue blew away like chaff in the wind. The stone that had smashed into the statue grew into a huge mountain that filled the earth. Daniel interpreted the dream saying that the various parts of the statue represented the earthly kingdoms of Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. During the time of the Roman Empire, the kingdom of God would come.

**Servants Honored**

*Daniel 2:47-49*

King Nebuchadnezzar was undone by Daniel's knowledge of the dream and its interpretation. He fell down and paid homage to Daniel. Then the great pagan king acknowledged God by proclaiming God's exclusivity. He is God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.

Daniel was awarded a high position in the government. He also received many gifts and was given rulership of the Babylonian province. He was placed in charge of all the wise men, and the king appointed his three friends to positions as administrators. Daniel and his friends knew that God's thoughts and ways were higher and deeper than those of people (Isaiah 55:8-9).

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## APPLICATION

### LEARNING ABOUT GOD IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

BY DAVID FAUST

I didn't expect to learn anything about God at the dentist's office—but I did. My dental hygienist chatted with me while she cleaned my teeth. (She did most of the talking.) Tooth enamel is the hardest substance in the human body, she explained, and "each tooth is composed of millions of tiny rods or tubules." These oblong crystals, which are about 1,000 times narrower than a human hair, protect against tooth decay and equip us for decades of chewing.

"Just one more reason to believe in God's creative design," I managed to mumble, and my hygienist nodded in agreement.

#### Surprising Classrooms

The Lord isn't confined to church buildings. Moses heard from the Lord at a burning bush and on a mountaintop. David encountered God while hiding in caves from angry King Saul.

Jesus' disciples learned about God while sailing across a lake, walking on a road, eating at dinner tables, and debating with antagonists. Paul's faith grew stronger on sinking ships and in prison cells. Peter gained new insights about God in a place he never expected to visit—the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. John received amazing revelations while he was exiled on the island of Patmos.

#### Surprising Teachers

Preachers and seminary professors have a lot to teach us, but so do new believers and little kids. And so do atheists and doubters whose questions make us dig deeper into the Scriptures and think harder about what we believe.

King Nebuchadnezzar learned about God from a surprising source. When no one could explain his troubling dream, the irritated and sleep-deprived monarch confronted his advisors with an impossible-sounding demand. He wanted them to tell him what he dreamed and its interpretation.

"Let the king tell his servants your dream, and we will interpret it," they answered nervously (Daniel 2:7), but

when the king persisted, they said, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!" (v. 10).

Eventually, the king discovered a surprising instructor among the young Jewish exiles. The Lord gave Daniel a detailed explanation of the dream and its meaning. Daniel's insight amazed the king, but the young prophet didn't take personal credit. He told Nebuchadnezzar, "This mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive" (v. 30). Instead, Daniel gave glory to God who "reveals deep and hidden things" (v. 22).

#### Surprising Lessons

According to the king's advisors, no one could reveal his dream "except the gods, and they do not live among humans" (v. 11). (Some translations of that verse say the gods' "dwelling is not with flesh.") But the New Testament presents a startling truth: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

God can do what appears impossible to us. He even knows what we dream at night. He has revealed deep and hidden things through creation and through the writings of his prophets and apostles. But his supreme revelation came through Jesus Christ, who is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

It's stunning to realize the Creator himself came to earth, took on human flesh, taught lessons that left people "amazed at his teaching" (Matthew 7:28)—and ultimately sacrificed his own life to show us grace. The songwriter was right to say, "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene."

#### Personal Challenge:

What amazes you about the Lord? How have you seen his wisdom and power demonstrated in your life?

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever had to trust God for an outcome that seemed unresolvable? Explain.

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 2:1-3, 17-23, 26-30, 47-49**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. King Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream (vv. 1-3) wherein God revealed the future. Why do you think God communicated in this way to a pagan ruler?
  - What does this teach us about God's sovereignty over all people and all nations?
3. When Daniel was made aware of the king's dream, he urged his friends "to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery" (v. 18) so that he could interpret the dream. What does this say to you about Daniel's faith?
  - How does this encourage you to trust God even in dire circumstances?
4. It was only by God's intervention that Daniel was able to tell the king what he had dreamed and what the dream meant (vv. 26-30). In what ways have you depended on God's intervention in your life?
5. As a result of Daniel's interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar recognized Daniel's God as "the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries" (v. 47). How can our faith, trust, and obedience today point people to God as the one true God?
6. Because he acted on his trust in God, Daniel was richly rewarded by the king (v. 48). Does God always reward faithfulness in this life? What does it mean to trust and obey God regardless of rewards?
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 8-28**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

**WEEK THREE**

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

**STUDY:** 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

## STUDY

# 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.

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## APPLICATION

### 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).

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## 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.

## WEEK FOUR

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

**STUDY:** 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

## STUDY

# REVEALED IN WRITING

BY MARK SCOTT

The Bible is full of arrogant kings. Among them: Pharaoh, Saul, Balak, Sihon, Og, Sennacherib, Xerxes, Herod, and Nero (though that last one is never actually named in the Bible). 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 (plural), 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 worshiped 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."

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## 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?

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## 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.

## WEEK FIVE

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

**STUDY:** 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

## STUDY

### 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.

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## 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 Baby-

lon 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?

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## 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:** This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "**1717: Your Word Is Truth**" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at [ChristianStandard.com](http://ChristianStandard.com).