

# BIBLE BACKGROUND

## JOURNEY 7: A SHUT OUT

### *Daniel in the Lions' Den*

**Key Passage:** Daniel 6

**Key Word:** *Commitment*

**Key Thought:** Keep your commitment to God no matter what happens.

**Key Verse:** "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act."  
—Psalm 37:5

## A NEW KING IN TOWN

In the last journey, we examined how God had taken care of Daniel's three friends. In this lesson, we will see how God took care of Daniel. More than 65 years had passed since the fiery furnace incident. Daniel predicted many events and all had come to pass, including Nebuchadnezzar's insanity and the fall of Babylon to the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5:31).

After Nebuchadnezzar died, one of his sons, Belshazzar, was made king sometime between 539 and 550 B.C., according to the historian Herodotus. One night the king gave a great feast with more than a thousand guests. In the presence of all, he called for the sacred gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem to be brought to him. He filled them with wine and gave them to his lords, his wives and concubines to drink. As they drank, they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron. In that very hour, the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the palace. The king's demeanor suddenly changed; he was terrified and began to shake. He called for the astrologers and soothsayers to explain what the writing meant, but none could interpret it.

Hearing of the event, the queen came to the banquet hall to see what was going on. When she saw the emotional state of the king, she advised him to call for Daniel. This was a man, the queen said, who has the spirit of the Holy God living inside him; he is full of light, understanding and wisdom (Daniel 5:14). He will be able to interpret the writing for you.

## THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL:

### *Daniel 5:13–23*

Daniel came before the king when he was called. When the king offered him gifts for the interpretation, Daniel refused them. He reminded him of what God had taught Nebuchadnezzar and how he had given him a kingdom, power and honor. Daniel rebuked

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Belshazzar for not having humbled himself before this God that his father had come to honor. This was the God who holds the king's breath in His hand and knows all his ways. Daniel went on to explain the writing on the wall. The language of the message was Aramaic. It described the end of the Babylonian Empire as being at hand.<sup>7</sup>

- Belshazzar's kingdom had been numbered for destruction.
- The king himself had been evaluated and found lacking.
- The kingdom of Babylon would be taken away and given to the Medes and the Persians.

After hearing the interpretation, Belshazzar made Daniel third in command throughout the land, but that very night, Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede became the next ruler (Daniel 5:30–31).

## THE CHEST AND THE ARMS RISE UP

Twenty-three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the city of Babylon fell into the hands of the Medes and the Persians. They had been portrayed as the silver-plated chest and arms in Nebuchadnezzar's statue. There was a new king now whose name was Darius. He immediately appointed Daniel as one of the three governors of Babylon. Daniel was an old man now, probably near 80, and his years of experience made him a valued advisor and source of information. Daniel did such a good job as one of the three administrators that the king decided to elevate him to a position of authority over all officials throughout the kingdom.

## A TRAP IS SET

This arrangement was most unsatisfactory to the other officials. They spied on Daniel, hoping to catch him doing something wrong. They decided to use his relationship with God as a way of demonstrating his unfaithfulness to Darius. They knew that Daniel would not compromise his faith for any reason because they had witnessed how he had prayed to his God three times a day. They finally convinced the king to make a law that everyone in the kingdom should only pray to him. The rulers of ancient civilizations often thought of themselves as gods and liked the idea of their subjects bowing down to them in submission.

King Darius approved of their suggestion, so with the stroke of his pen, he signed the law into action. Since the king had agreed to the terms of the law, it could not be revoked. He would be forced to carry it out even if he didn't want to.

## THE KING'S LAW

Soon the men caught Daniel praying to God just as he had done every day of his life. Daniel knew of the decree about prayer, but it caused him not one minute's hesitation. He continued to pray. He was taken before the king. Darius was trapped. He was grief-stricken

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<sup>7</sup> *The Believer's Study Bible*, W.A. Criswell, ed., Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, pp. 1189–1190.

because he cared so much for Daniel, but he had to obey his own law. He was forced to order that Daniel be thrown into a den of lions. The den would be closed with a rock and sealed so that no one could rescue Daniel. Before the stone was put into its final place, Darius called out to Daniel to say that he hoped his God would deliver him continually throughout the night (Daniel 6:16). Once the stone was in place, the king placed his own official seal to secure it. Inside, Daniel must have been amazed to watch the animals settle in for a peaceful night on the floor of the den.

## THE KING'S AGONY

Darius returned to the palace and tried to sleep, but it was impossible. As soon as it was light, the king ran back to the den where the lions were kept. As he got near, he began to cry out in anguish, "O, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:20). He suddenly heard Daniel's joyful reply: "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm" (Daniel 6:21–22).

The king was elated to hear the prophet's voice. He knew Daniel had done nothing wrong. He ordered that Daniel be immediately taken up out of the pit. He commanded the men who had organized the plot against Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den, including their children and their wives. The lions with mouths unrestrained literally devoured the people in midair before their bodies could reach the bottom of the den.

## THE KING'S DECREE

By this time, Daniel was more than 80 years old. He had been in captivity 66 years. His long life of faith and unwavering trust in God's provision for all his needs had saved him from destruction and brought glory to God. This incident led King Darius to issue a decree to all the people, nations and languages on the earth. People throughout his dominion were to stand in awe and fear before the God of Daniel (Daniel 6:26). For the third time, the behavior of Daniel, along with his friends, had caused strong and mighty kings to humble themselves and declare that Daniel's God was the living God whose kingdom would never pass away (Daniel 6:26).

## CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

There are many veiled references to Christ in the book of Daniel. He is the Great Stone who caused the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream to fall (Daniel 2:34–35). He is the Son of Man coming in glory to meet the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13). He is the fourth Man in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He is with the angel who closed the mouths of the lions. He is in the midst of Daniel's prophecy about the coming 70 weeks, waiting to take His rightful place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the scarlet thread of redemption woven into every page of God's Holy Word.



# TEACHING PLAN

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### *Daniel in the Lion's Den*

<b>KEY PASSAGE</b> Daniel 6	<b>KEY VERSE</b> "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act." —Psalm 37:5
<b>KEY WORD</b> <i>Commitment</i>	<b>KEY THOUGHT</b> Keep your commitment to God no matter what happens.



### INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

**CONNECT** the Big Room experience with the Bible story by asking the students questions about what they saw.

- "Which character was having difficulty making a commitment?"
- "What had happened to cause this lack of trust?"
- "How was the situation resolved?"
- "What did the main character learn from the experience?"



### TABLE TALK 1

**EXPLAIN** to the students that you need their help today to decipher a type of coded message. **ASK** them to gather into their table groups.

- Write the words of this sentence on separate sheets of paper: "Heaven belongs to those persons who have trusted Christ as their Savior."
- Direct their attention to the wall where you have hung these 12 sheets of paper in random word order.
- Tell the students you have written a special message to them, now displayed on the wall, and you want them to try to figure it out.
- Allow three or four minutes to do this. If they are successful, tell them they have read the handwriting on the wall.
- Next, tell them you have another "message on the wall" that is in the Bible lesson for today.
- Ask for their help in deciphering its meaning.
- Point to your four posters with these words: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*.
- When the students say they cannot figure it out, explain that it is a message from ancient Babylon.

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- Suggest that everyone open their Bibles to Daniel 5 to see if they can decipher the message.



## EXPLORING THE BIBLE PASSAGE

### ***Daniel 5:22–30: The Handwriting on the Wall***

This expression comes from Daniel 5:22–30, when Belshazzar, the successor to Nebuchadnezzar, was entertaining his friends at a large banquet. He ordered the servants to bring in the gold and silver vessels stolen from the temple in Jerusalem.

- The guests drank wine from these holy vessels as they worshipped their own gold and silver idols.
- Suddenly in the room, there appeared the fingers of a man's hand, writing something on the wall.
- There were four words that contained a message from God to Belshazzar. They were: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*.
- The king called for all the wise men and astrologers to come and interpret the meaning of the writing, but no one could.
- Then someone remembered that Daniel was an interpreter of dreams and visions.
- He was called in and promised great rewards if only he could explain the meaning of the handwriting.

**READ** what Daniel told the king as recorded in Daniel 5 and ask these questions:

- **Verse 26:** What was going to happen to the kingdom?
- **Verse 27:** What did God think of the king?
- **Verse 28:** Who would now rule the area known as Babylon?
- **Verse 29:** What did Daniel receive for speaking the truth?
- **Verse 30:** What happened to Belshazzar that night?

Therefore, the phrase “handwriting on the wall” came to mean that something terrible was about to happen. The king saw the handwriting predicting his death, and that very night he died. God had once again used His prophet Daniel to reveal His truth. God's protection on Daniel's life is a testimony to Daniel's commitment to God.

### **Daniel 6: Daniel in the Lions' Den**

**SAY:** Daniel had grown old in Babylon. Through the years, he had become a valued advisor to every king who ruled. King Darius so loved Daniel that he elevated him to a position of authority over the other officials. This made them furious, and they looked for ways to discredit Daniel. Have the students look up the following verses and discuss these questions.

- **Verses 3–4:** Why were the other government officials jealous of Daniel?
- **Verses 5–9:** What did they convince the king to do that was sure to hurt Daniel?
- **Verse 10:** Knowing about the new law, what did Daniel do all day long?
- **Verses 11–13:** What did the officials charge Daniel with?
- **Verses 16–17:** What did the king have to do? Did he want to do it? How did he think Daniel might escape?
- **Verses 18–20:** How did the king react in the morning?
- **Verses 21–23:** How did Daniel explain the miracle?
- **Verses 24–28:** What did Darius think of Daniel's God?



## THE CROSSROADS

**ASK:** How did God protect Daniel? Why was Daniel important to God? (*his commitment, his faith, his prayer life, his witness, his willingness to speak the truth even when it might be easier to lie*) How did God use Daniel in a foreign land? Did Daniel ever see his homeland again? (*no*) How do we know God loved Daniel? (*He answered his prayers and gave him visions to see the future and warn the people.*)

How does God know that you love Him? How does your commitment to Him really look? [*Share the plan of salvation and the importance of praying and reading God's Word every day.*]



## TABLE TALK 2: Application Opportunities

**SAY:** Daniel's commitment to God was what made him so exceptional. **ASK:** Will you *dare to be a Daniel*? If so, what will that look like in your everyday life? **HAVE** the students get into their table groups and describe what a modern-day Daniel might look like. **PROVIDE** paper for them to list the qualities a 2012 Daniel needs to be a godly example to others.



## BIBLE LEARNING ACTIVITY: "The Strength of a Lion" Plaque

**Supplies:** cardboard frames, colored foil squares 5" x 5", ballpoint pens or craft sticks, ribbon, 5" x 5" lion pictures to trace onto foil, Psalm 46:1 stickers (if frame is not preprinted with verse), glue, bowls, Q-tips®

- Distribute bowls, glue, Q-tips® and ballpoint pens or craft sticks among the students.
- Provide a cardboard frame, foil square, ribbon, lion picture and Psalm 46:1 sticker to each student.
- Instruct the students to place the lion picture on top of the foil square, and then trace over the picture with their ballpoint pen, embossing the picture onto the

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foil. (Note: Press hard when tracing the picture onto the foil for best results.)

- Using a Q-tip®, spread glue around the outside edge of the foil, then affix it to the back of the picture frame.
- Form a loop with the ribbon and then glue the ribbon to the back of the frame to form a hanger.
- Remind the students that our strength comes from God who made heaven and earth. He is our refuge and our rock. His strength is our strength. Our commitment to Him must remain strong all the days of our lives. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.



## SCRIPTURE MEMORY: *Psalm 37:5*

- **PROVIDE** each table group with 14 half sheets of paper.
- **HAVE** the students write out each word of the key verse on a half sheet of paper.
- **ASK** the table group leaders to scramble the words and then have one student at a time put them in the right order.
- **REPEAT** the process until everyone at the table has had a chance to assemble the key verse.
- **REWARD** students in the table group who can stand and say the verse in unison from memory.

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”

—Psalm 37:5



## A LOOK AT THE BOOK

**ASK** the students to complete the following activities.

- Look up Daniel 5:14. Daniel had a great reputation. Write down five words that you want other people to use when describing you.
- Look up Daniel 6:10. Write down three times when you are going to stop today and pray to God.
- Look up Genesis 49:8–9 and Revelation 5:5. Whom are these verses talking about? Who is this Lion and where did He come from?
- Why was a lion chosen to be the character of Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*? What makes a lion suitable for this part?



## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the name of the king who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon? (*Belshazzar*)
2. What did the king do at a banquet that showed his contempt for the worship of Daniel's God? (*He had his guests drink from the sacred cups that had been stolen out of the temple.*)

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3. What suddenly appeared within the banquet room? *(a hand, writing on the wall)*
4. Describe one thing the message communicated. *(The king's days were numbered. The king lacked the character to be wise and honorable. Babylon would be divided.)*
5. What happened to Belshazzar that night? *(He suddenly died.)*
6. Who became king next? *(Darius)*
7. How did Darius feel about Daniel? *(He respected him and gave him much authority in the land.)*
8. How was Daniel rewarded for his interpretation? *(with a purple robe, a gold chair and a promotion to the third-highest-ranking position in the land)*
9. What kind of a trap did the other Babylonian officials set for Daniel? *(They got the king to make a law that said anyone who prays to a god other than to the king should be thrown into a lions' den.)*
10. What did Daniel's prayer life look like? *(He prayed three times a day as he faced old Jerusalem.)*
11. What was the king bound to do, because of his own law? *(He had to have Daniel thrown into the lions' den.)*
12. What happened that night in the den of lions? *(God caused the lions to close their mouths and leave Daniel alone.)*
13. Was King Darius happy about this? *(yes)*
14. What new proclamation did Darius make? *(that Daniel's God was God and that He was to be honored and respected)*
15. How had Daniel's commitment to God saved his life? *(God used Daniel to proclaim His name to a heathen people in a foreign land.)*