

# 06

# AND PROPHETS PROVISION

LEADER GUIDE

  
the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

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ADULTS



WINTER | 2025-26



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# GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

## HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

God's plan to redeem humanity centered on Him forming a people through whom He would bring blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). Through the descendants of Abraham would come the One to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) and put an end to sin and death. Not only would God's blessing come through the Israelites, it would be extended to them. God had promised to care for His people, to protect them, and to be their God and their Father.

Just as God promised to take care of Israel many times, He also warned them of the consequences of disobedience. But they failed to listen. Time and time again, they played the harlot with pagan gods, wanting the faithful blessings of the one true God without being faithful to Him.

God's response through the prophets can be summarized by one word: Repent. God called His people to turn from their sin and turn back to Him. If they did, He would receive them back, but if they did not, He would bring destruction upon them—not punitive destruction but restorative destruction. His discipline is always corrective.

And still, the people would not repent; so judgment came. First, the Assyrian army conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and hauled off its people into captivity. But even witnessing this did not draw His people to repentance. And so the Babylonian army destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah and exiled its people.

God's people were prisoners in foreign lands, and the blessings of God seemed more distant than ever. But God was drawing His master plan together. At the close of the Old Testament, God restored His people to the land and the temple and Jerusalem were rebuilt. But then God went silent. For four hundred years, the people looked, listened, and waited—the stage was set for Jesus to come and crush the serpent's head.



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## THE EDITOR

Though exiled, God's people are never without His presence. God will discipline us, but He will never be far. And even in the discipline, He is longing to be restored into relationship and fellowship with His people.

We see this in the exile through the lives of Daniel and his friends. We see God's constant provision of protection when His people live out lives of faith, even under persecution and struggle. We see God's providential hand at work to show the world that He is Almighty God.

We see this in God orchestrating the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem, rebuilding their temple and their walls. God made a way for right worship to return because He longs for the hearts of His people to be made right with Him. And through the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people repented and confessed and returned to a yearning for God's Word and true worship of Him.

But the cycle of sin would probably continue. What hope was there of permanence in God's family, of complete restoration to the Father? The prophets foretold of a day when a true King will come, when complete rule and restoration will cause God's people to celebrate. Jesus Christ fulfilled that role of a King who would lead and be victorious, but not just over earthly battles, but over spiritual ones. He has already done that through His death and resurrection, conquering sin and death. And we await the day when He will return to judge all completely, getting rid of evil and bringing perfect purity and peace to His people.

### Y Bonesteele

Team Leader

The Gospel Project for Adults

### The Gospel Project®

Adult Leader Guide  
Winter 2025–26  
Volume 2, Number 2

Y Bonesteele  
Team Leader

Daniel Davis  
Content Editor

Rachel Myrick  
Content and Production Editor

Darin Clark  
Design Team Leader

Chad Hunter  
Contributing Graphic Designer

T. J. Norris  
Contributing Illustrator

Dwayne McCrary  
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

John Paul Basham  
Director, Adult Ministry

**Send questions/comments** by email to [TGP.adults@lifeway.com](mailto:TGP.adults@lifeway.com) or mail to Team Leader, The Gospel Project: Adult Leader Guide, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: Adult Leader Guide (ISSN 2163-0917; Item 005438061) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources.

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## THE WRITERS

### PERSONAL PREPARATION

#### **Caroline Chong**

(Unit 18, Sessions 1-5)

Previously a nurse, Caroline graduated from Beeson Divinity School in 2024 with her Master of Arts in Theological Studies. She is passionate about teaching biblical theology for the average churchgoer and loves church history. She and her husband, Marn, live in Birmingham, Alabama, with their baby, Phoebe, and dog, Penny.

#### **David McLemore**

(Unit 16, Sessions 1-4)

David serves as an elder at Refuge Church in Franklin, Tennessee. He is a regular contributor to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's For the Church website and writes on his own website, Things of the Sort.

#### **Katie Orr**

(Unit 17, Sessions 1-4)

Katie is the author of *Secrets of the Happy Soul*, seven FOCUSed15 Bible studies, and is the creator of the Bible Study Hub community, where women can receive training, encouragement, and accountability to enjoy God's Word. Katie holds an MA in Discipleship from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Chris, along with their three children live in Central Florida.

### GROUP EXPERIENCE

#### **Pam Gibbs**

(Unit 18, Sessions 1-5)

Pam is a freelance writer and spiritual director who earned her MDiv degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She lives outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband of 23 years. They serve as volunteers in a church plant in their area.

#### **Melanie Gillen**

(Unit 16, Sessions 1-4)

Mel lives in South Carolina with her husband and two teenage children. She has faithfully served the church for over twenty years. With an undergraduate degree in Religion and a Master's in Education, Mel finds the most joy when she's leading Bible studies or teaching others about the truth of God's Word.

#### **Jaclyn Mains**

(Unit 17, Sessions 1-4)

Jaclyn has a heart for discipleship and global missions. She serves with the International Mission Board as a writer and editor, creating training resources for churches and missionaries. She holds an MA in Religion from Liberty University and has served in women's ministry. Her husband is a youth minister, and together they are raising their son, Judah, to love and follow Jesus.

# THE IMPACT OF PRAYER

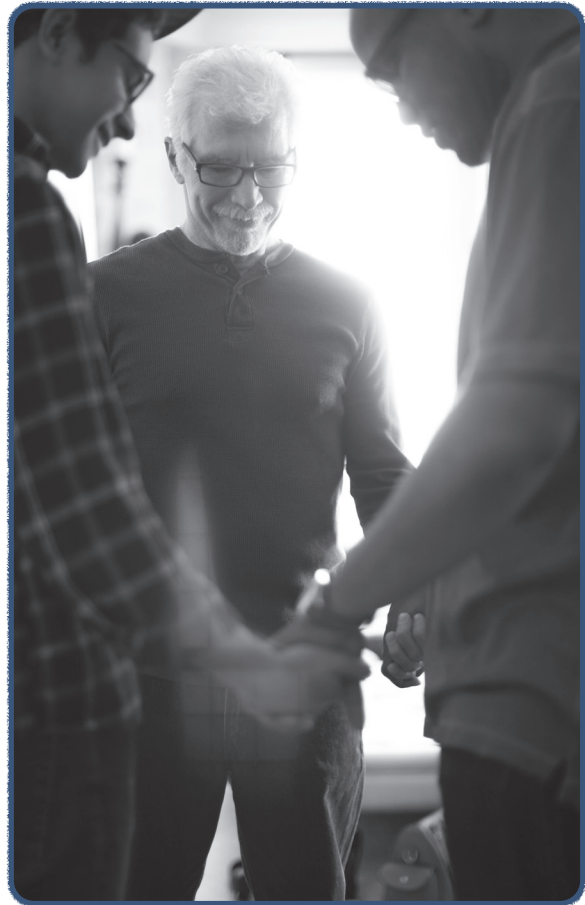
By Dwayne McCrary



God has been kind to me, allowing me to be a part of some wonderful churches and serve in multiple ways. He has allowed me to see Him do some mighty things that opened doors for me to help other leaders. God allowed me to be in a church that grew by a thousand people in attendance over a five-year period. God used a lot of resources to make that happen in that church. Staffing, city culture, and a variety of other things came together for that church to be driven with a passion to reach people with the gospel. We saw college students, convicted felons, a satanist, and many others become faithful followers of Jesus.

Several of us joined the staff at the beginning of those five years, giving the appearance that we were major contributors to that growth. Several of us began to be asked to write articles and lead conferences explaining what we were doing. As those invitations began to come, the challenge was figuring out what we were actually doing that contributed to the growth. Obviously, God used us and our talents to impact what was going on. We were faithful to training people, to looking for ways to reach out in our community, to starting new Bible study groups, and to giving outreach a priority, but those were actions others were taking and not seeing the same results.

The answer to why the growth was taking place came on an early Saturday morning when I went to the church parking lot to meet a group of men for a golf outing. To my surprise, another group of men were already in the church facilities. It was a smaller group comparably, no more than ten men. They had keys to the building, which was unusual to say the least. They met in the building every Saturday morning to pray. They prayed for what



would happen the next day, for God to remove obstacles for those who needed the Sunday School lesson and sermon, and for the people who would be leading the classes and worship. This smaller group met regardless of the weather or of the season. Not all would be present every week, but some would. Their only purpose was to pray. There was no coffee or food present. They had been faithfully doing just that for several years. The church

*As leaders of Bible study groups,  
we can impact our community by the way  
we lead the people in our group to pray.*

had been steady during those years, but what was happening at that point was what these men had been asking God to do from the first day they met to pray. They were finally seeing God answer the prayer they had been voicing for several years.

People were aware of this group of praying men, with most being impressed by their consistency but not impressed enough to make the commitment to join them. To be fair, they invited others to join them but did so with humility and without fanfare. They did not brag about what they were doing. Instead, they simply carried out the task of asking God to impact their city—every Saturday morning—for years. These men were marked by prayer. They were the reason we were seeing God do what He was doing at that time in the life of that church.

Imagine what might happen in your church if a few people were willing to be marked by prayer, to approach God with the hope of seeing Him reach a community or city for His glory, regardless of whom God used to do so or how He did so.

Imagine Sunday School classes ending their weekly gathering with a time of prayer that grew out of the passages studied during that hour, committing to follow God in whatever way He saw fit.

Imagine what might happen if the people who attended the Bible study groups then spent some of their prayer time during the week echoing the emphasis of the Bible passage studied, expressing their willingness to follow Jesus and His plans for them.

As leaders of Bible study groups, we can impact our community by the way we lead the people in our group to pray. Here are some specific actions we can take that might help:

- Maintain a list of the names of people our group is praying for who need to know and follow Jesus.
- Carry a list of people for whom we and the group are asking God to draw to Him through our conversations and witness.
- Make sure those names are the first item on any prayer list we distribute to our Bible study group.
- Set aside the second Sunday's group prayer time to focus specifically only on those same names, adding and updating.

What other actions could you take to encourage your group to consistently pray for people who are far from God and for the opportunity to share with them?

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**G. Dwayne McCrary** is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway. This article includes excerpts from his soon-to-be-released book *Marked by Prayer*. The book can be preordered at [Lifeway.com](http://Lifeway.com), releasing February 17, 2026.

## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point to the gospel of Jesus Christ through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources that show how God's plan of redemption unfolds throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. This curriculum provides theological yet practical studies that immerse your group in the STORY of the gospel, helping to develop a gospel CULTURE that leads to gospel MISSION.

### GOSPEL STORY

Our aim is to help people see the storyline of Scripture, the thread from the beginning to end, that weaves God's plan to rescue and redeem His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

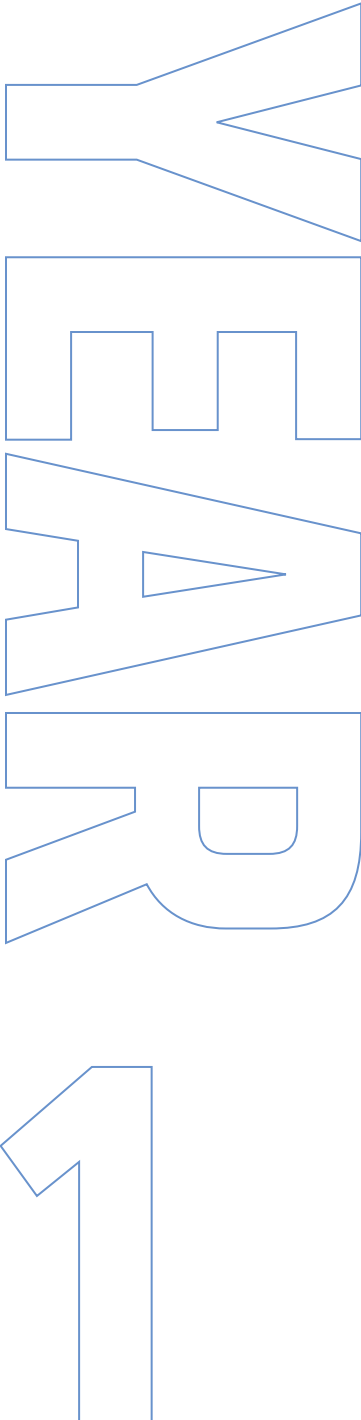
### GOSPEL CULTURE

Our hope is that the message of the gospel saturates our understanding of Christ, increasing our joy in Him, helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

### GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to empower believers to live on mission, declaring the good news of the gospel in word and deed for God's glory and the growth of His kingdom.





**VOL 01:**  
**CREATION AND COVENANT**

(Genesis; Job)

Fall 2024

Unit 01: Foundations

Unit 02: God's Promises

Unit 03: Struggles of Faith

**VOL 02:**  
**LAW AND LIFE**

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)

Winter 2024–25

Unit 04: God's Miraculous Work

Unit 05: God's Character

Unit 06: Humanity's Selfishness

**VOL 03:**  
**LAND AND LOSS**

(Joshua–1 Samuel)

Spring 2025

Unit 07: God Is for His People

Unit 08: God Delivers His People

Unit 09: God Cares for His People

**VOL 04:**  
**FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM**

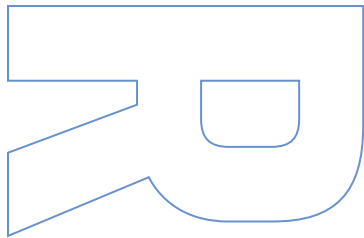
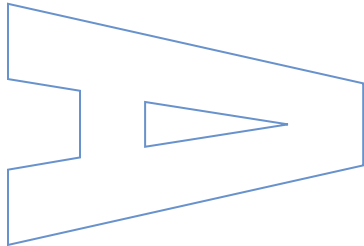
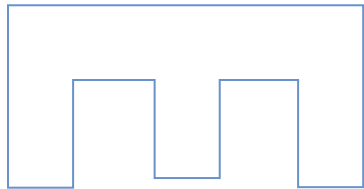
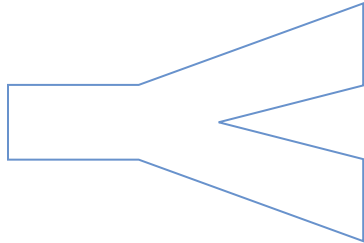
(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)

Summer 2025

Unit 10: The Foolishness of God's People

Unit 11: Everything Belongs to the Lord

Unit 12: The Need for Wisdom



**VOL 05:**

**DIVISION AND DEFIANCE**

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)

Fall 2025

Unit 13: Divisions

Unit 14: Renewal

Unit 15: Decline

**VOL 06:**

**PROPHETS AND PROVISION**

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)

Winter 2025–26

Unit 16: God in the Exile

Unit 17: God in the Restoration

Unit 18: God in the Return

**VOL 07:**

**THE SON HAS COME**

(The Gospels)

Spring 2026

Unit 19: The Arrival

Unit 20: The Preparation

Unit 21: The Ministry

**VOL 08:**

**THE SON HAS AUTHORITY**

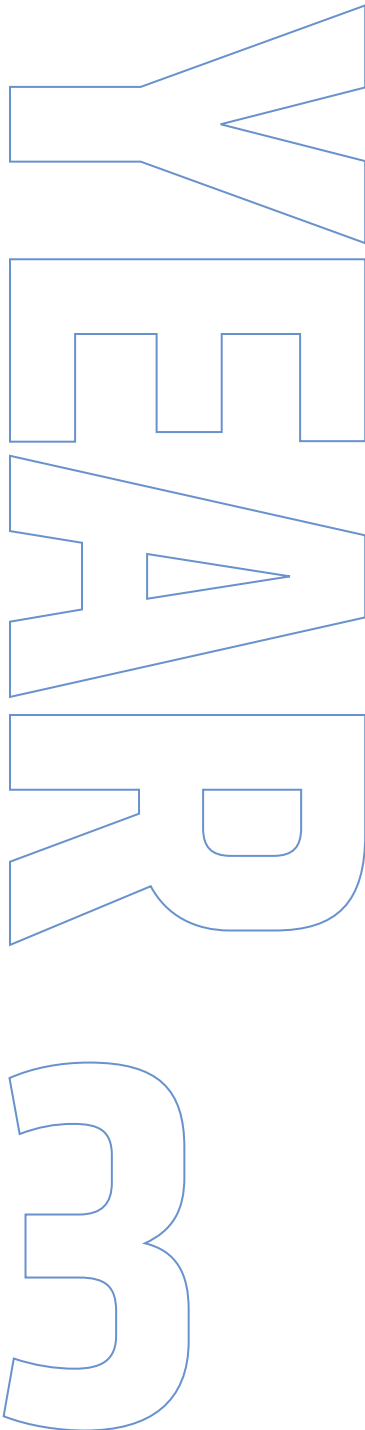
(The Gospels)

Summer 2026

Unit 22: Responses to Jesus

Unit 23: The Way of Jesus

Unit 24: The Teachings of Jesus



**VOL 09:**  
**THE SON HAS TRUTH**

(The Gospels)

Fall 2026

Unit 25: The Truth of His Power

Unit 26: The Truth of His Actions

Unit 27: The Truth of His Kingdom

**VOL 10:**  
**THE SON HAS RISEN**

(The Gospels; Acts)

Winter 2026–27

Unit 28: The Final Days

Unit 29: Post-Resurrection

Unit 30: The Gospel Spreads

**VOL 11:**  
**THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION**

(Acts; The Epistles)

Spring 2027

Unit 31: Sharing Truths of the Mission

Unit 32: Living Out the Mission

Unit 33: Christ Focuses Our Mission

**VOL 12:**  
**THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE**

(The Epistles; Revelation)

Summer 2027

Unit 34: We Are in Christ

Unit 35: We Are Citizens of Heaven

Unit 36: Jesus



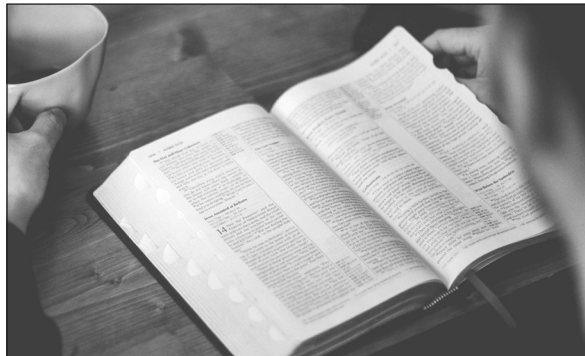
## HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

The Leader Guide is an important tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

### 1) READ THE WORD DAILY

Begin each week by reading the Scriptures according to the Daily Readings. These Bible readings will help you mentally and spiritually prepare for the group experience each week while also building healthy Bible study habits for personal growth. The daily readings will help you understand the context of the Bible story for each week's session and fill in the gaps between sessions. The weekly psalm reading will help you think worshipfully and prayerfully about the story's place in the greater redemptive narrative of the Bible. And the timeline will give you a visual perspective so you can place the Bible story in the larger context of the Bible's storyline.

- **Daily Readings**
- **Chronological Timeline**



**TIMELINE**

Daniel and His Friends Remain Faithful to God's Dietary Laws (Daniel 1)

**SESSION STUDY:** Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship Nebuchadnezzar's Statue (Daniel 3)

Daniel Interprets the Writing on the Wall for Belshazzar (Daniel 5)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream (Daniel 2)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream (Daniel 4)

Daniel Is Thrown into the Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

**Daily Readings**

<input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Daniel 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Ezekiel 40-44
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Daniel 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Ezekiel 45-48
<input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Obadiah	<input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 14



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

31

## 2) STUDY FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages that will guide you and your group to prepare for Bible study during the week before group time begins. A Bible study prompt will help you engage with the Scripture passage, but encourage your group to do more than what's asked in the prompt. Space is provided for you and your group to add notes and questions and markings that will help you study the passage more deeply and see any nuances about the words and phrases of the Scripture provided. In addition to a brief commentary with thought-provoking questions to help you and your group dig deeper into the text, leader notes will provide you with additional nuggets for understanding the Scriptures. Use this Personal Preparation to experience what your group is experiencing as they study the week prior. Consider what questions, thoughts, or challenges they might have while engaging with the Scripture passages.

- Scripture
- Commentary
- Questions

Notes

PERSONAL PREPARATION

**GOD IS ALWAYS ABLE TO SAVE (DANIEL 3:14-18)**

Circle all the conjunctions, the connecting words, in the passage (and, but, if, then, when, etc.).

<sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. <sup>17</sup> If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

King Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold statue to be the center of worship for his subjects. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (previously called Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) determined not to bow to it—they worshiped the Lord alone, even while facing a gruesome death. Some Chaldeans, likely jealous these Jews were set over Babylon's affairs, told the king these three men would not serve his gods nor worship his statue, which enraged the king (vv. 1-13).

Daniel's friends determined to obey God's commandments: "Do not have other gods besides me. Do not make an idol for yourself" (Ex. 20:3-4). So Nebuchadnezzar, himself jealous for the worship and total submission of his subjects, did what all people do who set themselves against the one true God—he persecuted God's faithful people, threatening them with death by fire.

**LEADER NOTE:** These three men faced a very real threat. Standing before the king, perhaps they saw the furnace in the distance. Their earthly lives seemed to be in Nebuchadnezzar's hands. At the same time, these three men saw the ultimate weakness and smallness of Nebuchadnezzar compared to the Lord. They believed in the almighty, sovereign power of their very real God. Like Jesus's apostles after them, they could have said, "We must obey God rather than people" (Acts 5:29). Perhaps Peter had Daniel's three friends in mind when he said those words before those who crucified Jesus.

**What are some ways believers today experience difficulties and persecution for their faith?**

Notes

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

The persecution coming for these three courageous Jews was a very real threat, yet they saw this as an opportunity for them to give glory to God. Nebuchadnezzar mocked their God, claiming to have supreme power in this matter (Dan. 3:15). Still, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained firm in their faith. They would worship God alone, no matter the outcome. The Lord could rescue them with a miracle, but He might not. Both were acceptable outcomes because the Lord alone is the true God who is worthy of worship.

**THEOLOGY CONNECTION**

**MIRACLES:** A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order or supersedes natural laws for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

These friends embodied Paul's words from Philippians 1:21: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." For the Christian, there is no losing situation. As Jesus said, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The reverent fear of God is the end of all other earthly fears.

**LEADER NOTE:** Jesus told His disciples they would be persecuted for His name (Matt. 10:16-18). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were forerunners for those courageous disciples, and for us. They knew they faced the king's fury not because of a failure of faith but precisely because of their faith, and they trusted God with the outcome.

**How can we become people who exhibit faith and courage even in the face of death?**

**VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY**

"Let faith be yours, and God will be with you in your trouble."<sup>1</sup>  
—Augustine of Hippo (c. 354–430)

3) DIRECT THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to be used in the group context to engage your group in active learning. The personal prep you and your group put into the days leading up to your group time will provide a richer discussion and more thoughtful theological applications to mutually encourage each other during your group time. The first page of the Group Experience will help you engage your group members as they arrive. Dialogue suggestions describe the context, transitions, and a recap of Bible readings or previous sessions to remind your group of what has already been studied or give a framework for where the lesson is heading. The second page gives a visual representation of the activity from the Personal Study Guide. A teaching outline helps guide your members through the activity and the debrief discussion.

Key Concept: God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

GROUP ACTIVITY

**CHART:** Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Modern-Day Statues and Furnaces." Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group's responses.

Modern-Day Statues and Furnaces

Read Daniel 3:14-18, 24-29. Identify some modern-day "statues" that demand worship and modern-day "furnaces" we may face for upholding the gospel.

MODERN DAY GOLDEN STATUES	MODERN-DAY FIERY FURNACES

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read Daniel 3:14-18.

**ANALYZE:** Invite the group to form small groups of 3-4. Say, "Although most of us will never be asked to worship a golden statue, there are plenty of idols that we will be asked to worship or that will vie for our attention." Guide the groups to create a list in the PSG of modern-day "statues" believers are expected to go along with. After a few minutes of discussion, invite a volunteer from each group to call out their findings. Record these in the left column on the board. Suggest adults write down other groups' findings on their own chart in the PSG.

**SAY:** Nebuchadnezzar was furious the three men would choose not to worship the statue he had made, so he had them thrown into the fiery furnace. Jesus said His followers would face persecution by those who hated Him. (Read Matthew 10:16-20.) Though we may not face a fiery furnace, we should expect consequences for standing firm for the sake of the gospel.

Notes



- Group Activity
- Interactive Questions
- Theological Applications



## 4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

After the recap of the activity, help your group take the next steps with the day's Scripture lesson by walking them through the Head, Heart, and Hands applications. Invite volunteers to share and discuss answers to the questions for their mutual benefit. Then take prayer requests and praises as you wrap up your group time. Space is provided to jot those down in your guide for prayer during the following week. And finally, guide your group to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word as you conclude the session.

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

**Why is it important that we believe the miracles in the Bible?**

**HEART:** Courage is a heart posture, a reliance upon God no matter the cost. Jesus doesn't coddle us but tells us the truth—we will have suffering in this world, but He also said He has overcome the world (John 16:33). No wonder the most repeated command in the Bible is “Do not fear” because “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

**What in your life keeps you from trusting God and obeying with courage?**

**HANDS:** Courage is faith displayed. We inevitably will run into obstacles, temptations, and hard decisions while following Jesus. Yet these are opportunities to show courage in Christ, knowing that He has saved us by grace through faith and has given us His gift of eternal life.

**How will you act with faith and courage this week, trusting the Lord for direction, words, and boldness?**

**NEXT STEPS**

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Matthew 10:16-20. Reflect on Jesus's promise that the Holy Spirit will give us the words and courage to stand firm.
- Consider how the various areas of your life need to be adjusted to ensure you are not conforming to the ways of this world but conforming to Christ.
- Share with someone in your group how you will stand firm for the gospel this week, and invite a followup conversation later in the week.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

**PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES**

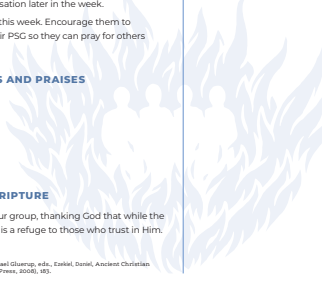
**PRAYING SCRIPTURE**

**CLOSE:** Pray through Psalm 144:6 with your group, thanking God that while the wicked world is spinning out of control, He is a refuge to those who trust in Him.

**References**

<sup>1</sup> Augustine of Hippo, quoted in Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gleason, eds., *Exodus, Daniel, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 85.

Notes



- Application Questions
- Scripture-Based Prayer
- Prayer Requests

# PROPHETS AND PROVISION

By David McLemore



When my wife and I began dating, we quickly realized we had different vibes. I was a laid-back, go-with-the-flow kind of person, while she was a planner. When I asked her out on a date, she wanted to know where we were going, when we were going, how long we would be there, and what would happen after that. My “we’ll play it by ear” answer wasn’t good enough. She needed to know what her future held.

I learned later that such knowledge calmed her. She could relax and enjoy herself if she knew what was coming next. Aren’t we all that way to some degree? While I didn’t need to know what was next, I have always longed to know if I would be okay while waiting for an uncertain future. No one likes to be in the dark.

The Bible opens with God saying, “‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). That verse isn’t only a comment on creation; it is a comment on revelation. God doesn’t keep us in the dark. God doesn’t make us go without. Through His prophets, the Lord tells His people what’s ahead, and through His provision, He cares for them while they wait.

## PROPHETS

The Bible’s first great prophet, Moses, was sent to the Israelites with a message of God’s concern for their oppression and His promise to deliver them (Ex. 3:7-10). But Moses originally pleaded for God to send someone else, claiming he had a sluggish tongue (4:10). But a sluggish tongue is no problem for God. As the Lord told the apostle Paul thousands of years later, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Since Moses was God’s prophet, he didn’t need any of his own power. He had the power of the Almighty with him, as did every Old Testament prophet.

From Moses to Elijah to Jeremiah to Malachi, God’s prophets proclaimed God’s desire to dwell with His covenant people and for them to keep covenant with God by obeying His commands. They failed to listen to the prophets, and His warnings of judgment came to pass (2 Chron. 36:16). But God’s heart was always for His people, and His prophets were His voices in the exile calling them to return to Him and be restored (Jer. 29:10; Ezek. 39:25; Dan. 9:25; Zech. 10:6; Mal. 3:7). If only they would return to Him, their weeping and sadness would only last the night; joy would come in the morning (Ps. 30:5).

Through the prophets, God’s people could know what was coming, the good and the bad. But God did more than inform—He assured His people that His provision would accompany His prophecy. They could trust His heart.

Jesus is the ultimate prophet who speaks a better word  
than all the rest, and He is the ultimate provision that  
secures our future forever.

## PROVISION

When the news wasn't good and the days ahead looked grim, God's provision was racing alongside His prophecy. The hard truths were wrapped in sweet truths of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. God would not abandon His people, for He had bound Himself to them through His covenant of grace. He would remain faithful, and when they needed Him, He would be there. When they passed through the waters, He would be with them. The rivers would not overwhelm them. And when they walked through the fire, they would not be scorched, and the flame would not burn them (Isa. 43:2).

That was true for Israel as they walked on dry land through the Red Sea (Ex. 14). It was true for Daniel's three friends, whom Nebuchadnezzar threw into the fiery furnace (Dan. 3). It was true for Daniel, who was thrown to lions (Dan. 6). God provided for His people. And it was true for Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, who experienced God's provision and favor to protect their people.

Biblical prophecy works on several levels. It can be fulfilled in multiple ways and at various times. Often there is an immediate fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. We are not Israel hemmed in by the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, but we face sin and death daily. We are not Daniel's friends facing brazen idolatry or the fire, but we face the trials and tribulations of life as a Christian in this broken world.

What is our hope in such times? We find the answer in the prophets. The greatest provision promised from their mouths was not relief from the waters or flames of this world but from the waters and flames of death and hell. The greatest provision was not in earthly and temporal redemption but in eternal salvation in Christ: "He was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isa. 53:5).

The greatest Prophet is also the greatest Provision: "Long ago God spoke to the ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus is the ultimate prophet who speaks a better word than all the rest, and He is the ultimate provision that secures our future forever.

In Jesus we have a prophet who lets us know what's ahead and a provision to sustain us as we wait. No one likes to be in the dark. Praise God that the light has come in Christ!

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**David McLemore** serves as an elder at Refuge Church in Franklin, Tennessee. He is a regular contributor to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's *For the Church* website and writes on his own website, *Things of the Sort*.



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 16

# GOD IN THE EXILE



DANIEL



#### MEMORY VERSES

“I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.”

—Daniel 7:13-14



# OBEDIENCE

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 1:8-21

## CONTEXT

In 605 BC, a few short years into King Jehoiakim's reign over Judah, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took control of Jerusalem, made Judah's king his vassal, and carried off some high-profile young men as exiles to Babylon. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were brought to the palace to be educated in Babylonian ways so they could serve their new king. For three years they were trained in all things Babylonian—language, customs, and religion—and faced the temptation of losing their identity as God's people.

## KEY CONCEPT

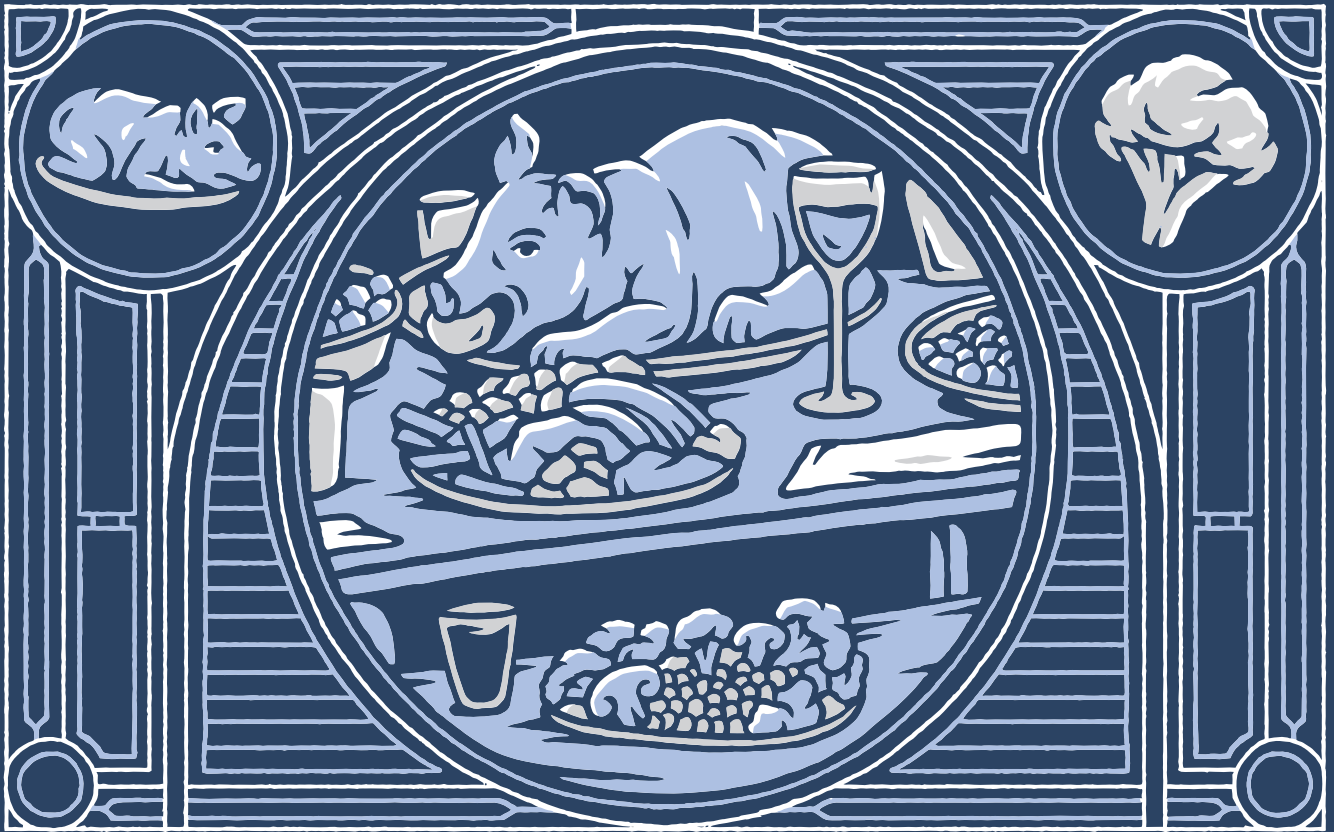
**Obedience to God leads to greater wisdom from God.**

As you examine Daniel 1:8-21:

- Recognize that Daniel determined to remain faithful to God and His law with its dietary restrictions.
- Consider how our obedience to the Lord helps us grow in wisdom and knowledge of the Lord.



Scan this QR code to **PROVIDE FEEDBACK** of your experience with The Gospel Project for Adults materials.



## TIMELINE

Nebuchadnezzar Takes the First  
Exiles to Babylon, Including Daniel  
and His Three Friends (2 Kings 24)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
First Dream (Daniel 2)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
Second Dream (Daniel 4)

**SESSION STUDY:** Daniel and His Friends Remain  
Faithful to God's Dietary Laws (Daniel 1)

Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship  
Nebuchadnezzar's Statue (Daniel 3)

## Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Daniel 1:1-7
- ☐ **Day 2:** Daniel 1:8-21
- ☐ **Day 3:** Daniel 2:1-13
- ☐ **Day 4:** Daniel 2:14-24
- ☐ **Day 5:** Daniel 2:25-49
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 112



Scan this QR code to access  
this session's Scripture passages.



## PURSUING OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS ALWAYS RIGHT DESPITE THE OBSTACLES (DANIEL 1:8-14).

**Underline the steps Daniel took in order to obey the Lord.**

**8** Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. **9** God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, **10** yet he said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king." **11** So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." **14** He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days.

Obedying God is not always easy, but imagine being in Daniel's shoes: far from home, a captive of Babylon, and forced to assimilate to their culture and serve their king. Most people in such a situation would try their best to stay on their captor's good side, not wanting to draw any additional attention to avoid further suffering. Daniel's conscience, however, wouldn't allow such a route. He determined not to defile himself with the king's food and wine. His obedience to God meant more to him than any suffering that may come as a result.

How Daniel was being obedient in rejecting the king's food is somewhat unclear. Some scholars say the king's food was offered to idols, but might vegetables have been offered as well? The most reasonable option may be that Daniel wanted to obey God in keeping his Jewish identity and rejecting full assimilation into Babylonian ways. He couldn't control what others called him. He couldn't control what they taught him. But he could control what he put in his body, and that act of obedience would help him remain close to God. Beyond any specific dietary law, faithfulness was Daniel's goal. This was a risk, as obedience often is, but it was a risk worth taking for Daniel.

**LEADER NOTE:** In our day, it's hard to imagine how vegetables and water wouldn't be better for one's appearance than meat and wine, but that's because our standard of beauty differs from ancient Babylon's. Babylonians admired well-fed young men with the body and mind to prove it, hence Nebuchadnezzar's order in Daniel 1:3-5. When we want to lose weight, we eat vegetables and drink water. But Daniel wanted to eat vegetables and drink water to obey the Lord, risking not matching up to Babylon's standards. How could that possibly work? Only God could do it. That's the entire point. God's sovereignty weighs heavy on this passage.

**How have you felt the riskiness of obedience to God in this world?**

Verse 9 tells us that God granted kindness and compassion to Daniel from the chief eunuch. When we follow God's call on our lives, He will prepare the way and give us wisdom for the road ahead (Jas. 1:5). It was with wisdom that Daniel intended to obey the Lord. He began by asking permission. He didn't throw a fit; he was respectful. Yet he was also clear. He had reasons beyond personal preference and the need to prove a point—he didn't want to defile himself. This was a matter of faithfulness to him, and God blessed that act of faith.

With wisdom, Daniel also offered a test to the guard: vegetables and water for ten days followed by an evaluation. This reasonable option gave the guard, and the eunuch, an opportunity to honor Daniel's request and not put himself in jeopardy. If it didn't work, the supervisors had an out. If it did work, Daniel and his friends wouldn't have to defile themselves. Through it all, God was at work, and no matter the outcome, He would get the glory through Daniel's actions.

**LEADER NOTE:** Daniel was a risk-taker but not reckless. His faithfulness was not an attempt at gaining God's favor in an unfavorable situation. Rather, Daniel's faithfulness was grounded in the faithfulness of God. He was not surprised at the current events, for he had heard God's word through the prophets that came before him (see Jer. 25). What God says, He is faithful to do, even in judgment. But Daniel was alive and now in a foreign land, in a position of influence, no less. So he let the grace of God work deep in his heart and teach him to lean wholly on the God who saves, no matter the circumstances. Ultimately, he knew he belonged to the God of Israel, and he would remain faithful to the Lord whatever came his way.

**How can God get the glory from our obedience, whether the outcome is positive or negative?**

**GOSPEL CONNECTION**

Our obedience to God comes from faith in His character and works. He has always been faithful, even in suffering. Christ obeyed the Father through suffering. And from His example, our obedience to Christ demonstrates our faith in Him.

## Notes

**Bonus Content**

Scan this QR code to see that God positioned Daniel among the wise men of Babylon, leading to the wise men's arrival in Bethlehem hundreds of years later.

## WHEN WE OBEY GOD, KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM INCREASE (DANIEL 1:15-21).

**Highlight the result of Daniel and his friends' faithful obedience.**

**15** At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. **16** So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. **17** God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. **18** At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. **19** The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to attend the king. **20** In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom. **21** Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel's "risk" paid off. After ten days, Daniel and his friends looked better than all the rest. Yet this was but the first "better than" for God's people in the king's court because their obedience gave rise to more wisdom from the Lord.

Verse 17 shows how obedience is a wise step we take on the path toward wisdom. In fact, wisdom cannot be gained any other way—it is a gift from God that grows as we cultivate it and our relationship with the God of all wisdom. A young doctor who wants to make it big in his field cannot skip the obedient study and preparation required. An athlete who wants to play at the top of his game for a long time cannot forsake the obedience required to eat the right foods, do the right exercises, and care for the body. Obedience is the path to grow toward what we ultimately want, but it is born from what God does for us.

**LEADER NOTE:** God will always bless obedience. Now, the blessing of God can look different than our expectations. Daniel and his friends were still in captivity. God didn't send them back home. But He did give them favor in their new land. God did use them for His glory in their hard circumstances. A life of obedience to God often may look like failure to the world, but that's because the world cannot see ultimate reality. God is the mover behind all things, and all the wheels are turning for His glory and His people's good. Not immediately, but ultimately.

**How does obedience help cultivate wisdom in the Christian life?**

### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS:** Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

Daniel and his friends' obedience was used by God to grant them knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. In fact, no one was found to be their equal (v. 19). This is even more remarkable when we realize that what they excelled in was not the things of God but the things of Babylon. They became Babylonian literary experts, and Daniel understood visions and dreams. They surpassed all the king's advisers in providing him helpful counsel. Even in captivity, Daniel and his friends pursued the well-being of the city that it and they might thrive and be a testimony to the greatness of the one true God (Jer. 29:7). Still, Daniel and his friends would face a fiery furnace and a lions' den in the days ahead. Faithful obedience will result in increased godly wisdom but may also come with a worldly cost.

What can we learn from this? Not just that God will always grant wisdom, but that He will always be with us in whatever He sends us to do. We can trust His plan even when we can't see the path. Our call is to obey Him and let Him prove His goodness to us.

**LEADER NOTE:** Wisdom is not only knowing what to do in certain situations but also how to recognize the gravity of a situation. To many, Daniel's diet may have meant nothing. Hadn't he and his friends already accepted the new names and the education? Yet Daniel recognized this was the hill to die on. He knew this was the opportunity to mount a faith-based resistance. This was an opportunity for God to come through. Daniel and his friends were at God's mercy alone. They could not make their bodies look better than the others. Only God could do that. Wisdom was knowing this was the time to take a new step toward glorifying God, and God came through.

**How can our obedience shine a light on God's glory for others to see?**



## Notes

## ARRIVAL

**ENGAGE:** As the group arrives, ask: “What have been some of your New Year’s resolutions from the past year? Have you followed through with any resolutions? If you didn’t follow through, how long did your determination last?”

## CONTEXT

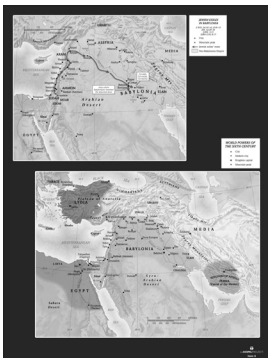
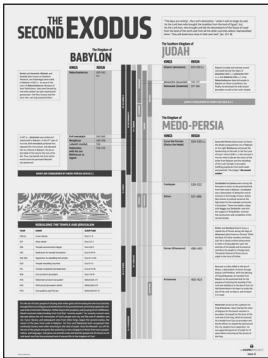
**TRANSITION:** A lot of times our resolutions fall flat when we lose motivation. Or perhaps we find our goals were not realistic or required too much sacrifice. In contrast, Daniel 1 motivates and inspires us to determine to serve, obey, and follow God despite our circumstances. Daniel and his friends show us that obeying God is always the best decision. Trusting the Lord to find a way for our obedience where there doesn’t seem to be a way is always better than the alternative.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Display **Pack Item 2: The Second Exodus** and **Pack Item 4: Babylon and the Exile Map** to help visualize the following context points for today’s study. Say: “Daniel and his friends were subject to an early exile to Babylon some years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and took the cream of the crop of Judah’s population back to Babylon, almost a nine-hundred-mile journey away from their home. This wasn’t a scholarship program for their sake, however. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best of Judah’s society to assimilate and advocate for Babylonian culture. It was in this context that Daniel and his friends determined to obey the Lord.”

## RECAP

**ASK:** Whether this story is familiar or not, from your personal preparation this week, what details strike you as most important for understanding the passage?

**TRANSITION:** Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had a difficult choice put before them. They could obey the Babylonian king and gain his favor by abandoning their beliefs and convictions, or they could remain steadfast in their faith in God and face the potential consequences. Let’s consider their reasons, and ours, for striving to fear and obey the Lord over men.



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## GROUP ACTIVITY

## Notes

**CHART:** Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Whom Shall We Fear?” Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s responses.

## Whom Shall We Fear?

Read Daniel 1:8-21. Compare and contrast the reasons Daniel and his friends had for fearing the king of Babylon versus fearing and obeying the Lord.

FEAR THE KING	FEAR THE LORD

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Daniel 1:8-10.

**DISCUSS:** Given his context as an exile in Babylon, why do you think Daniel was determined to obey God's law? From this passage, what is one reason Daniel would have had to fear and obey the Lord? (*the Lord is sovereign and kind [v. 9]*) What was the chief eunuch's primary fear? (*being executed by the king [v. 10]*) What does Matthew 10:28 have to say about whom we should fear?

**READ:** Invite a second volunteer to read Daniel 1:11-16.

**DISCUSS:** How did Daniel respond to the chief eunuch's fear of the king? What might we learn from Daniel's response? From this passage, what is another reason Daniel would have to fear and obey the Lord? *(the Lord can and does bless His people who fear and obey Him [v. 15])*

**READ:** Invite a third volunteer to read Daniel 1:17-21.

## Notes

**DISCUSS:** How had King Nebuchadnezzar already asserted his earthly power over Daniel and his friends? What consequences from the king could have fallen upon them for their principled obedience to the Lord? What were the results of the friends' fear of the Lord and their obedience to Him? (*the Lord gave them knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, and the Lord gave Daniel the gift of understanding visions and dreams [v. 17]; Daniel and his friends excelled in their service to the king [vv. 19-20]*) How does this narrative exemplify the truth of Proverbs 1:7?

**DEBRIEF**

**How do our decisions dictate our actions?**

**(PSG p. 22) What reasons do we have to fear the Lord and obey His commands?**

**SUMMARIZE**

Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or wine. Because they feared the Lord above all, Daniel and his friends were able to hold fast to their resolve and stay true to their beliefs and convictions—they obeyed the Lord. If Daniel had feared the king and his earthly power, succumbed to temptation, and eaten what he wanted, the king of Babylon would not have seen the wisdom and power of God in him.

**HEAD, HEART, HANDS**

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 23). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



**HEAD:** Daniel didn't give into his circumstances. He kept his wits about him, believing the Lord more than the king of Babylon was worthy of his fear and obedience. That's instructive for us as believers in Jesus. When life isn't going as expected, we are never without the kindness of almighty God. We can go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him for wisdom to see His work in our lives as well as the determination to obey Him above all.

**How does the fear of the Lord relate to our obedience to the Lord?**



**HEART:** We likely will not be taken to a foreign land, indoctrinated in a foreign culture, and fed foreign food, but we all will face suffering. Daniel's life helps us see that even in suffering—even in exile—God is still at work and worthy of our obedience. Israel was punished for their sin, but God had not given up on them. He was still with Daniel and his friends. He was still their God. When your life doesn't go as planned, He will still be your God too.

**Under what circumstances do you find it most difficult to obey the Lord, and how can you prepare yourself for those times?**



**HANDS:** Daniel's faith wasn't private. Everyone around him knew where he stood—with the Lord. Because of this, Daniel was persecuted for his faithfulness, but he never wavered. In that regard, Daniel is a type of Christ, who never wavered even in the face of suffering on the cross to take away our sins. *(Pass out copies of Pack Item 3: Seeing Jesus in the Exile and Return to help make this connection and others throughout the volume.)* Jesus's faithfulness was for our benefit, securing forgiveness and justification through His death and resurrection. True faith is never private but active in the real world. It was for Daniel and Jesus. It should be for us as well.

**How will you determine to obey the Lord so He gets the glory through your actions?**

### NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Consider any decisions you need to make today that will impact your future actions, such as a commitment to Bible study, praying for lost loved ones, or sharing the gospel with others.
- Address habits or behaviors that may give an unbeliever the wrong idea of what it means to follow Christ.
- The fact that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah also stood strong with Daniel may have made it easier to obey God. Whom can you encourage to remain steadfast in godly living this week?

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

**CLOSE:** Pray through Psalm 112:4-9 with your group. Thank God that He blesses those who fear and obey Him, both in good and bad times.

### Notes

