



4

God Protects

Key Theme

- God is omnipotent.

Key Passages

- Daniel 3:1–30, 6:1–28; Acts 5:27–32

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the trust the three men had in God.
- Explain how God protected Daniel.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

- Write on the board, “How old was Daniel when he was in the lion’s den?”
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Activity 1: God Protects Class Notes

Students will fill out the God Protects Class Notes as you study the lesson.

- Student Guides
- God Protects Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Pencils



Studying God’s Word

The captives in Babylon were faced with persecution. Nebuchadnezzar ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to bow down to an idol. The young man Daniel was forbidden to pray to God. They all witnessed God’s mighty hand of protection when they obeyed the Lord God.

- Go Before the Throne.
- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity: Prepared to Suffer

Students will read the account of a Christian facing persecution and various passages of Scripture, seeking to understand what persecution looks like in their current context.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

When we left Daniel and his three friends in Lesson 1, they had been torn from their homeland, had their names changed, and had been trained to stand in the court of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. After three years of training, these young Jews were promoted to places of prominence. God blessed them with wisdom and abilities far beyond any others in the court. Daniel served in the king's presence, and the other three were set in positions of authority in the government (Daniel 2:49).

Sometime after their promotion, King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden idol and called all his governors and officials together to dedicate the idol (3:1–3). As the trumpet sounded and the musical instruments played, everyone was supposed to bow down and worship the image. If anyone refused, the penalty was death in a fiery furnace. What were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to do? To obey the order from the king would be to bow down to a false god—something they knew was clearly condemned by God in the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4–6).

As they demonstrated in their previous test of being expected to eat the king's food, they were committed to serving God above serving the king. Their failure to bow was brought to the attention of the king by other leaders who may have been jealous of the trio's quick rise to power. When Nebuchadnezzar heard of their disobedience, he was enraged and asked the three if the charge was true. The king offered them the chance to bow down to his idol. The three men responded that if they were thrown into the furnace, God could protect them. But even if God did not save them, they would rather face the king's punishment than disobey God. What trust! What loyalty to their God!

Enraged all the more, Nebuchadnezzar commanded the furnace be superheated and the three men bound and tossed in. Then, the king looked and

saw four men walking unbound in the middle of the flames, and one had the appearance as the "Son of God." Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and knew that something supernatural was happening. As the three men emerged from the furnace, not only were they not burned, but also they did not even have the smell of smoke on their clothing.

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God's angel had protected them. Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree to put to death anyone who spoke anything against God, and he promoted the three men even more. Nebuchadnezzar recognized that there was a God who could thwart his kingly commands. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had dramatically demonstrated their trust in God, and God showed Himself mighty to save them from the flames, and He received the glory for their protection.

Likewise, Daniel was placed in a similar situation in chapter 6. Although Daniel is commonly presented as a youth in pictures depicting this account, he was near 80 years old during the reign of Darius the Mede. Daniel had served the kings of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires as a counselor for at least 60 years at this point and had been blessed by the God he faithfully served. Likely because of jealousy, the other leaders hatched a plot to have Daniel killed. They convinced King Darius to issue a decree that no one could pray to any god but the king for 30 days.

Daniel knew of the decree and he faced a choice: continue to honor God by praying to Him or face being thrown to the lions. The men who set the trap had surely seen Daniel's habit of praying three times a day and were waiting for him to remain faithful to God. Seeing Daniel praying as usual, the other leaders took the charge before the king, demanding that Daniel receive the due penalty. Despite the king's efforts to reverse the situation, Daniel was thrown into the den with the lions.

As the morning dawned, King Darius ran to the den and called out to Daniel, asking if God had preserved him. To the king's delight, Daniel replied that God had sent His angel to shut the mouths of the lions

to protect him. Because Daniel trusted in God, he was saved through this trial. In response, King Darius had the families of all those who had plotted against Daniel thrown to the lions where they were quickly devoured. Darius also wrote an edict that everyone in his kingdom should fear God; it seems that Darius came to truly trust in God. Daniel continued to prosper in the reign of Darius and then King Cyrus.

All four of these Jews were faithful and maintained a positive testimony before kings. The writer of Hebrews undoubtedly had these two events in mind when he penned 11:33–34 and spoke of those who had “stopped the mouths of lions” and “quenched the violence of fire.” And we are called to follow their example of faith in God. By faith in God’s omnipotence and sovereignty, we must honor Christ whatever the cost.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Throughout the Old Testament, God appeared to man. The angel that protected the three in the furnace may have been an appearance of God the Son—Jesus Christ before He came as a babe. Though the text is not perfectly clear on this point, some translations render verse Daniel 3:25 as “the Son of God” and verse 28 as “His Angel” to make that connection. Christophanies, the appearance of the Son in the Old Testament, are also found in Joshua 5:13–15 and Judges 6:11–24, as well as other places. Likewise, the protector of Daniel in the midst of the lions may have been Jesus Himself.

The Apostle Paul told his young disciple Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are living examples of that verse. God’s people have always been persecuted for their faith in God and for obeying His commands. We see the apostles in the book of Acts responding in a way similar to Daniel and his friends. When commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus, they

refused because God’s authority and commands trump the commands of men: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:27–32). This is the same refrain, in different words, that Daniel and the other three men proclaimed.

In 1 Peter 3:13–17, Peter also wrote of persecution for the sake of Christ and the gospel. We are called to honor God by telling others of the hope we have, but expecting that we will suffer for it. God may choose to protect us from the suffering, as He spared Daniel and the others, or He may allow us to experience imprisonment, beating, or death, as many Christians have suffered throughout the ages. Regardless, we are to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, being faithful to obey everything that He has commanded us. We are to trust His omnipotent care for us and make His name great among the nations. Pray that God would give you the strength to obey Him and trust fully in His care for you.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Almighty One, I stand amazed at your power and sovereign grace. I am humbled as I study the lives of your servants in Babylon. What would I do—how would I react in the face of such severe persecution? Holy Spirit, grow strength and courage in me as I study your Word. And grow my faith as I take opportunities to be faithful in the small things. When I face trials, I’ll try to count it all joy, knowing that you are building my character and faith. Let my students gain these deep truths from this study. This lesson points out YOUR omnipotence—not the power, courage, and strength of any man. We are weak, Lord, but you are strong! Through you alone can we have hope and courage to live victoriously! Reach my students with these truths, I pray.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “Why was the New Covenant necessary?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Review

Our lesson today will be the last in the period of the Babylonian Captivity. We have looked at how the captives were treated in Babylon and how God continued to deliver messages to His people through His prophets. Those messages were of hope mixed with the judgment they had deserved for their idolatry.

- ? What was the message of hope that we discussed last week? *God had promised to initiate a New Covenant, and that covenant was sealed in the blood*

of Jesus. The coming Messiah was still part of God's plan for His people.

God is always faithful to fulfill His promises, and it is His absolute power over the entire universe that allows Him to bring about the plans that He has made and protect and guide His children.

Today we are going to look at two acts that demonstrate God's sovereignty in very dramatic ways. One comes near the beginning of the captivity and one closer to the end.



- Write on the board, “How old was Daniel when he was in the lion's den?”



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Let's read Daniel 3:1–30 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? As we discuss this passage, fill in the answers to the Class Notes questions in your Student Guide.
- ? Which king was in power in Babylon at this time? Fill in the answer to question 1. *Nebuchadnezzar. This dates the events sometime after the second complete year of his reign (Daniel 2:1), around 600 BC.*
- ? What did Nebuchadnezzar build? How large was it? Answer question 2. *He built an image of gold that was about 90 feet tall and likely in the form of a man—a representation of himself.*

- ? **What commandment of God was he violating?** *God had forbidden making idols (representations of God) that represented anything on earth (Exodus 20:4).*
- ? **What was the command of all of the people who were present before the image?** *They were to bow down and worship it at the signal of the music.*
- ? **What can we infer about Nebuchadnezzar's character, knowing that he ordered people to worship his image?** *It would be safe to infer that he was quite arrogant, elevating himself to the position of a god. This is confirmed by his statements in Daniel 4:29–30.*
- ? **What was the penalty for those who failed to worship? This is number 3 in your Student Guide.** *They were to be cast into a fiery furnace.*
- ? **How did Nebuchadnezzar come to know that the three men did not bow down?** *Verse 8 says that certain Chaldeans accused them to the king.*
- ? **How did the king respond?** *He was enraged and brought them to be arraigned.*
- ? **Did he cast them into the fire immediately? Answer number 4.** *No, he gave them a second chance to worship the image.*
- ? **What does the end of verse 15 reveal about Nebuchadnezzar?** *He believed he was above any god and could bring about his own plans without any hindrance.*
- ? **How did the three men respond to the king?** *They did not try to defend themselves, but told the king he was wrong.*
- ? **How did the three men demonstrate their trust in God above the threats of the king? Answer number 5.** *They said that God was able to save them from the fire and the king's hand.*
- ? **How did they demonstrate their understanding of God's sovereignty?** *They clearly stated that God was able to deliver them, but it was His prerogative to decide whether or not He would deliver them.*
- ? **How did Nebuchadnezzar respond?** *He was furious, again, and had the furnace heated seven times as the men were cast in.*
- ? **What happened when the three men were cast into the furnace? This is question 6.** *The men who led them in were killed by the heat, and the three men went in bound and in their clothing.*
- ? **What did Nebuchadnezzar see in the furnace?** *He saw four men, not three, walking around loose with one who appeared as the Son of God.*

Interestingly, this section of Scripture is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Many translations render the Aramaic phrase as “Son of God” in a way that points to Jesus. However, this would seem to be a bit out of place since Nebuchadnezzar, a polytheistic, pagan king, would have no appreciation for the Trinity or that Jesus is the Son of God. So the best translation is probably “a son of the gods.”

➤ The NKJV translates the end of verse 25 as “Son of God” with a footnote indicating that the phrase could also be translated “a son of the gods.”

However, it is completely consistent with other passages of Scripture that we have mentioned where Jesus appeared in physical form. This could be another example of a theophany, but the language here does not allow us to be dogmatic. In verse 28, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that God sent an angel to protect the three men. Some translations also capitalize Angel to point to Jesus. Where Scripture is clear, we must be clear, but there is a bit of room here to understand this as an angel or as Jesus. Regardless, God was pleased to send a servant to save the men.

? How completely did God protect the men? Answer number 8 in your Student Guides. *There was not even the smell of smoke on their clothing, nor was their hair singed. Contrast this to the men who died just taking them to the doors of the furnace.*

? Was it appropriate for these men to disobey the king whom God had placed in authority over them? *While God calls us to submit to governing authorities (1 Peter 2:13), we also see clear examples of obedience to God being placed above obedience to earthly authorities.*

? Can anyone think of a New Testament account that demonstrates that obedience to God should come above obedience to men? *Allow discussion.*

In Acts 5, there is an account of the apostles being imprisoned for preaching in the name of Jesus. The council of Jewish elders had brought Peter and other apostles before them, telling them not to preach in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:27–32

Let's read Peter's response to the council in Acts 5:27–32. *Read the passage aloud as the students turn there.*

? In light of Peter's clear statement, was it wrong for the apostles to teach in the name of Jesus, disobeying the civil authorities? *No, they were obeying God when man had commanded them to sin.*

? What law of God would the three Jewish men have been violating if they had bowed down to the statue? *The first of the Ten Commandments says to worship God alone, and the second says that to bow down to any image is sin (Exodus 20:4–6).*

? How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to these events? *Verses 28–30 describe his reaction. He blessed God, affirmed the men's actions, and made a decree that anyone defaming God would be killed and their property destroyed. He also promoted the three men.*

Discover the Truth

God made man in His image, but Nebuchadnezzar placed himself in the position of God—making an image of himself for people to worship. His arrogance was clearly demonstrated in this act and further demonstrated by desiring to kill anyone who would not bow down and worship him. He thought he was sovereign and powerful.

? What attribute of God explains His power over the events of the fiery furnace? *Omnipotent: God is all-powerful and has power over fire.*

OMNIPOTENT

The three Jewish men knew that God was able, if He desired, to save them from the fire. In their words to Nebuchadnezzar, they demonstrated an amazing amount of trust in God—whether they lived or died, they knew He was in control and that they were safe in Him.



READ THE WORD

Turn a few pages to Daniel 6:1–28 and let's read about a similar situation Daniel faced. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Daniel 6:1–28

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the king in this account? Answer question 8 in your Student Guide.** *Darius the Mede (See 5:31). He was 62 years old at the time he took over Babylon. This places these events in 538 BC.*
- ? **How old was Daniel at this point?** *While many pictures represent Daniel as a youth, the timing of these events makes it clear that he was an old man. If he was taken away as a teen in 607 BC and these things happened in 538, 69 years later, this would place Daniel well over 70 years old as confirmed in Daniel 9:1–2 where he recognizes the end of the 70 years is over.*
- ? **Answer question 9: Why did the other governors set a plot against Daniel?** *The text does not explicitly say, but it is likely out of envy that he had been set in power above them. It is also likely that his Jewish faith was another source of contention, with many in that region hating the Jews. They could find no fault in Daniel, so they had to develop a scheme to overthrow him.*
- ? **Did the governors and satraps who presented the king with the proposed decree speak truthfully?** *No. They said that all of the governors of the kingdom had agreed to the decree when it is sure that Daniel had not.*
- ? **Question 10 asks, “How did Daniel respond to the decree?”** *He continued to pray to God in the same manner he had always done “since early days.” He prayed toward Jerusalem three times a day with his windows open.*
- ? **How did King Darius find out?** *The other governors assembled to watch Daniel praying, knowing that he would continue his habit.*
- ? **How did the king respond?** *He was displeased with himself and tried to figure a way to work around the decree.*
- ? **Why couldn't he just reverse his decree?** *Three times in the passage we see that the decree cannot be reversed. This is where the common expression “the law of the Medes and Persians” (referring to something that cannot change) comes from.*
- ? **What did Darius say to Daniel as he was being thrown into the lion's den?** **Fill in number 11.** *He encouraged him that God would deliver him.*
- ? **How was the den secured?** *A stone was rolled in front of it and it was sealed with the signet rings of the king and governors. This was likely done with clay or wax along one edge of the*

stone where it met the wall so that it would be obvious if the stone had been moved. We see this same practice with the tomb of Jesus in Matthew 27:66.

- ? **After the king had spent the night fasting and was not able to sleep, how did he approach the lion's den?** *He was hopeful that God had preserved Daniel.*
- ? **How was Daniel preserved? This is question number 12.** *God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions.*
- ? **How does Daniel give credit to God?** *He plainly states that God was the reason for his safety.*
- ? **How does the king respond? This is the last question in your Student Guide.** *He was exceedingly glad and ordered all of the deceitful governors and their families to be thrown to the lions. He also issued a decree calling everyone in his kingdom to tremble before and fear God.*
- ? **Why was Daniel saved from the lions?** *God was pleased to honor Daniel's faithful actions as indicated in verses 22–23.*
- ? **Did God have to save Daniel?** *No. He could have allowed him to die.*
- ? **Does God always save His children from evil plots against them?** *No. We have many other examples in Scripture where believers were killed for their faithful actions.*
- ? **Was Daniel justified in disobeying the king's decree?** *Yes, and he plainly states that he had done no wrong before the king.*

Discover the Truth

Just as God had been pleased to save Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah from the ungodly decree of Nebuchadnezzar, God was also pleased to save Daniel from the decree of Darius. Both of these kings had exalted themselves to the place of God by their decrees. In both cases, obedience to God above obedience to man was blessed as these men were protected from the harm intended to them. All of these men trusted God in an amazing way.

God clearly demonstrated that He is more powerful than the kings, the governors, the lions, or the fire. There is none like Him. As Darius said, He is the living God, and He delivers and rescues as He reigns over a kingdom that cannot be destroyed. God is mighty in power.





Prepared to Suffer

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

You will be reading an excerpt of persecution from *Voice of the Martyrs*, so you will need to print off a news item from www.Persecution.com describing how some group or individual is suffering for the sake of Christ. You may also consider playing a video clip available from the *Voice of the Martyrs* site.

The four men we talked about today were faced with situations where they had to choose between honoring God or honoring man in the face of grave consequences—literally. I doubt that many of you have faced such decisions, and you may wonder if you would be able to respond in a way that honors Christ.

We are going to read an account of our Christian brothers and sisters and what they are facing for the sake of Christ. *Read the account from the Voice of the Martyrs.*

? How does this suffering compare to the accounts of Daniel or Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah? *Discuss the connections, focusing on suffering for doing what is right in God's eyes rather than man's eyes.*

Let's look at a few passages of Scripture that talk about facing persecution. In each of these passages, I want you to think about what brings about the persecution and what the response is to be.

Will someone please read John 15:17–21? *Discuss the verses, noting that Jesus told his followers that they would be persecuted for the sake of His name.*

Next, let's read 2 Timothy 3:10–12. *Discuss the verses, noting that Paul experienced persecution as he preached the gospel, telling Timothy that he should expect the same. All who live godly in Christ Jesus should expect to be persecuted.*

Next is 2 Corinthians 4:7–11. *Notice that the persecution does not indicate that they are forsaken by God, but that they are suffering for Jesus's sake. The deliverance from or grace under persecution was an evidence of the power of God working through them.*

Now, let's look at 1 Peter 3:13–17. *Those who follow Christ are blessed to suffer persecution at the hands of evildoers as they speak of the hope of Christ.*

Finally, let's read Philippians 1:29–30. *God has granted us the privilege to suffer for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel. We don't usually think of suffering as a privilege, but that privilege has been granted to us by God.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? In our culture, it is not likely that we are going to be imprisoned or beaten for our beliefs, but what does persecution for the sake of Christ look like in your present situation? *In most cases, insults and cold shoulders are likely the extent of the persecution. However, people who share the gospel on the streets or in public places are increasingly being harassed and even imprisoned.*

? If we are not currently experiencing any forms of persecution, why might that be the case? *It is possible that everyone around us is a Christian and agrees with us, but it is more likely that we are not actually living a life, in our words and actions, that distinguishes us from the world. If we are not boldly proclaiming the gospel, why would we expect to be persecuted for righteousness sake or the name of Jesus Christ?*

As we live our lives to honor Jesus, we should not go out and actively seek to be persecuted and beaten. Neither should we act in an obnoxious manner that would invite persecution for our actions. If we are to be reviled, it should be for the sake of Jesus Christ. The world we live in recoils against the exclusive claims of Jesus and the idea that no one can come to the Father apart from the forgiveness that is found in Christ.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

In all of the things we examined today, we see God's power evident in His protection and care for His children. While God is not required to save us from the fiery trials that come our way, we can absolutely trust that He is more than able to do so in any situation. He is absolutely powerful over all of His creation. He made the fire. He made the lions. He made the tree that Jesus hung on as He paid for our sins. He is able to give us the grace that we need in the moment that the trial comes.

We can look to Daniel and others in the Bible as examples of acting in faith. Take some time to read through Hebrews 11 for more examples of suffering for the sake of devotion to God, and take heart at the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us, all the while fixing your eyes upon Jesus who is the author and finisher of your faith. Even if we face death in this present life, we can be assured of victory in the next life in Christ.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What is the relationship between knowing God and His character and trusting Him in the face of trials?** *We cannot trust someone we do not know. If we misunderstand God and His character, we will not know how to trust Him. If we don't know who He is and what He has done, we cannot fully trust in Him.*
- ? **As you think about the four men we talked about today and the trials that they faced, what strikes you most about their demonstration of faith?** *Discuss various answers and offer those as examples to imitate.*
- ? **How does the life of Jesus offer us another example of trusting God in the face of persecution and trials?** *Jesus was able to face all that He did because of His constant communion with the Father. He knew God perfectly, yet in His human nature He struggled*

against being obedient as He faced the Cross—yet He did not sin. He asked God the Father to take the cup of wrath that He was about to drink, but in an attitude of trust in the Father’s character and plan. We should strive to have that same attitude.

? Soren Kierkegaard said, “Christianity has been made so completely devoid of character that there is really nothing to persecute. The chief trouble with Christians, therefore, is that no one wants to kill them anymore!” How do you see this in our culture? *Many Christians have abandoned the proclamation of truth, especially the truth that Jesus is the only way to be forgiven of sins. It is difficult to tell the difference between those who are truly members of the church and those who are members of the world. They watch the same movies, attend the same schools, support the same causes, and embrace many compromises when it comes to the authority of Scriptures. Daniel and the others demonstrated Christ-like character as they faced the persecution from the kings.*

? How does viewing persecution as a privilege and knowing that Jesus suffered for you give you courage to proclaim the gospel and live your life in a way that is consistent with God’s Word as the authority in your life?

Discuss various answers, focusing on the trust that we have in Christ and the knowledge that He will equip us by His Spirit to face any trials he allows us to experience or brings into our lives.



MEMORY VERSE

Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for sending Jesus to suffer on our behalf.
- Praise God for giving us examples of holiness to follow, especially in Jesus.
- Ask God to give our persecuted brothers and sisters around the globe the strength and courage to bear the burdens they face for the sake of Christ.

