

# Illustrated Bible Life

## Night Sky

**H**ave you ever been terrified? I mean, really afraid, in full fight-or-flight mode? I have never really thought about that question much before last fall. I was traveling on a long stretch of desert highway, one I had driven many times before. I call it the hundred-mile desert because that's about how far it is between Baker, Nevada, and the first signs of civilization across the Utah border to the west.

I was on that road late one night several years ago. Astonished by the number of stars I could see, I had pulled over just to gaze at the Milky Way overhead. That night, I wasn't afraid, just overwhelmed by the beauty of the night. I remember how reluctant I was to tear myself away to continue my journey.

This past fall, on that same stretch of road, I felt it was a waste not to take a few minutes to stare once more at that beautiful night sky. So I pulled over and got out of my car. Yet, though I could see the stars, I couldn't see much else, so black was the night outside the glow from my car. For some reason, that impenetrable darkness terrified me that night. I tried to absorb the miracle of creation in the night sky, but the fear was too strong.

Suddenly, the running lights on my car went out, and I was in complete darkness. Immediately, that uneasy fear turned to panic. I jumped in my car, started the engine, and tore off down the highway. Soon, the lights of a car far off in the distance ahead comforted me that I wasn't all alone in the universe as it had felt out there in the darkness, but it took me some time to regain my sense of calm.

As I was doing research for the photos this quarter, I came across many, many pictures of Daniel in the lion's den. Artists often paint religious figures with unnatural calm and poise in the face of dangers and despair, and so it is with Daniel. So many of those artworks show him calmly resting among the lions. It is the rare artist who allows Daniel to show something less than full composure. The stained-glass image used in Session 5 is one of those exceptions. In that work, the angelic messenger is stopping the mouth of a lion, while below, another lion seems fiercely impatient to get at Daniel. Daniel himself, meanwhile, prays for deliverance.

Daniel is a remarkable young man, one who probably deserves to be painted as piously calm and unmoved, even by hungry lions sharing his prison. Yet he was human too, of course. Later in his book, he notes that he was "terrified" and "appalled" at his vision (8:17, 27), so we know he felt fear just as we would have.

I always find these shared moments of humanity with biblical figures greatly comforting. The God who stilled their fears is the same God I depend on today. I don't know if there was anything to truly fear out there in the darkness of that desert night last fall, but the God of Daniel was there with me, just as He was with Daniel in the lion's den.