

The writings (2)

Group Study 9



- Lamentations
- Esther
- Daniel
- Nehemiah, Ezra
- Chronicles

Lamentations

Lamentations is a book about the mess sin has caused – the mess of exile from God – and facing it. It is a heart rending book. So when everything is laid waste, where is Jesus?

Questions:

1. **Read Lamentations 3:22-24.** Where are we to look for strength in a world laid waste before God?

Towards the end of the book comes a most remarkable verse:

The LORD's anointed, our very life breath, was caught in their traps (Lamentations 4:20, NIV).

Jesus (our Christ) knows our pain because he too has suffered. If our 'very life breath' is with us we can face a terrible world and even a failing church – as long as we trust him alone.

Esther

Famously Esther is the only book in the Bible where God is not named. How is life to be lived in a world where your Saviour is unheard of and unseen?

From the beginning we hear of Xerxes who rules most of the known world (Esther 1:1). He loved to display how much he owned, and the glory of his majesty (Esther 1:4).

But he is humiliated by his wife, and seems incapable of making decisions relating to his private life.

The question is – where does the real power lie?

A wife is selected for him – the godly Mordecai's step-daughter, Esther (2:7). Haman (who hates Mordecai and God's people) gains power and tricks the king into a plot to destroy God's people (Esther 3). Again it seems God is not in control, but those who scheme and plot their own lives – the enemies of God's people.

God's people humble themselves and cry out to him (4:1-3) and the gallows prepared to hang Mordecai are used to hang Haman.

Those looking on see where the real power lies.

Those who plot against God's people find their end is always the opposite of their plans (9:2). Eventually Mordecai is promoted to second in the kingdom (10:2-3) and he works for the welfare of God's people.

In a world that ignores God, when power and influence seem to lie elsewhere and Christ is ignored and not even named, his purposes do not fail. There is only one way to look at this present world.

2. **Read Revelation 11:15.** What will happen to the kingdoms of this world?

This is the wise way to live! The people of the nations saw it (Esther 8:15-16). Mordecai saw it. Esther saw it. The question of the book is – have you?

Daniel

Daniel and his friends live in a world hostile to God where the country they live in is godless. How do they cope with daily life in a godless world?

Firstly Daniel knows that whatever appears to go on this world –
There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (Daniel 2:28, NIV).

It is the unseen God in heaven who is on the throne.

Even Nebuchadnezzar, the destroyer of Jerusalem, is brought to see that Jesus must run even his life. Surely one of the most remarkable conversions ever! **Read Daniel 4:37.**

This needs to be remembered however difficult life is – Jesus is still on the throne!

The Christian's hope is the future not the present.

The visions at the end of the book show the happy person is the one who knows what is here is temporary. The future is eternal, and however bad life is, or is going to get, there will be an end.

Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end (Daniel 12:12, NIV).

3. Read Daniel 7:13-14. What is the eternal kingdom that will never end? How should this affect the way we live now in a hostile world?

Nehemiah and Ezra

In the Hebrew Bible these were one book and when you read them the reasons become obvious.

Ezra is concerned with building the temple while Nehemiah is concerned with rebuilding Jerusalem - they worked together in these great tasks.

Both wanted to **build something God had appointed** – to show off the glory of Christ in the gospel.

Both emphasize the **importance of prayer in the task.**

Both emphasize the **importance of God's law in the task.**

Both emphasize the **need to confess sin and know forgiveness in Christ.**

Both of them **know all kinds of persecution** while carrying out their tasks.

In Ezra, even though the temple is to be rebuilt as a witness, the glory does not descend as happened in the previous temple. They know it is just a shadow.

In Nehemiah it is clear all the people, whatever their background, are to make every effort to help in gospel work and they are taught to live lives that glorify God.

4. Read Ephesians 2:21-22. We are involved in a building project what is it?

5. Read Ephesians 3:10. What is its purpose?

Chronicles

We now come to the last book of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. It really is a huge overview of history.

It starts with Adam in verse 1. There is a brief history of all the nations of the known world (1 Chronicles 1:5-16) all of these are remembered as part of God's good purposes.

Then we see how God has not only been faithful in providing a seed for Adam, but the seed runs through Abraham, the twelve tribes, David and the Levitical high priests.

Not one of God's promises fail. Even though there is an exile right at the start of the book God ensures it is seen from the outset (1 Chronicles 9:1-34) that he is still in control and the promised Messiah will come. No-one can doubt that having seen the detail God keeps at the beginning of Chronicles.

David who points to the coming Messiah, is introduced at the start of the book. It is astonishing to notice how many of David's mighty warriors are from the nations, for example Uriah the Hittite (11:41) and Ithmah the Moabite (11:46). The coming Messiah is for the nations.

The next great theme introduced is the importance of the ark of the covenant. Why? Because as we have seen, it is where the One who is enthroned between the cherubim sits, and it is where they can enquire of the Lord (13:3) – the real King.

6. Read 1 Chronicles 16:28-31. Listen to David's prayer. Who does he want to praise the King who sits enthroned between the cherubim? Why?

The great messianic prophecy occurs in 1 Chronicles 17:
I will set him over my house and my kingdom for ever; his throne will be established for ever (1 Chronicles 17:14, NIV).

The nations submit to David (1 Chronicles 18 – 20). Then follows a great cosmic vision of the heavens and earth – with the temple at the centre depicting the Messiah's rule (See 1 Chronicles 21-29 and 2 Chronicles 1 – 10).

David is excited by the temple and all it points to, but he knows God is King over heaven and earth and life on this earth is not it.

David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all (1 Chronicles 29:10-11, NIV).

We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope (1 Chronicles 29:15, NIV).

The main part of the temple (1 Chronicles 3:4-7) is still cut off from the ark – the throne where the King rules his people. This is still in the most Holy place behind the curtain with the cherubim guarding sinners from seeing God's rule (2 Chronicles 3:14). The priesthood and sacrifices are still there to break through the curtain (1 Chronicles 23 – 24 and 2 Chronicles 4).

Heaven and earth are still divided and waiting for the Messiah to come.

Revival

From Solomon there is no gradual slide into exile 345 years later. The church does not go silently into the night, it rages at times and fights hard to enjoy God's blessings.

Occasionally the people of God repent and cry out to God and there are great revivals. (Occasionally there are kings like David and apostles like Paul who could say 'Follow me as I follow Christ').

One such revival occurred in Israel's darkest hour – halfway through Manasseh, the most godless king's reign (2 Chronicles 33:15). The church of Jesus Christ can never be written off.

But the most remarkable of these revivals is found in 2 Chronicles 34 – 35 under the rule of Josiah. It takes place after the darkest time in the church's history.

The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah, with the priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem. This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (2 Chronicles 35:18, NIV).

Because God did this the Latter Prophets could pray ' Revive your work in the midst of the years.' If he did it in the darkest hour he can do it again.

If you read back through the Bible and church history you will see that the work of God is rarely a slow gradual process – its greatest and most long lasting work is done in sudden revivals.

Pause for thought

Do you believe God could suddenly do something great through you and your church?

7. What should be your response to your answer?

The end of the Old Testament is extraordinary. A Gentile king, Cyrus, who recognizes the division between heaven and earth makes this command:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you--may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up." (2 Chronicles 36:23, NIV).

But the question still remains. Where is the Messiah who rules the heavens and earth and tears down the curtain? Where is the Messiah who brings the Gentiles in? Where is the Messiah who is the Lord of all history?

This is why the Gospels start with the question: 'Are you the Christ?'

Summary Questions:

What did this study teach me about Jesus?

What did this study teach me about the Bible?

What did this study teach me about myself?

Jesus



