



## **Getting started with the “Writings”**

### **Ruth, Esther, Daniel & Lamentations**

In Jewish thinking the Old Testament was divided up in to three sections, Law (the first 5 books, of Moses), the Prophets (some of which we read last month) and the “writings”, which consists of Proverbs, Psalms, the poetic books, books detailing periods of Israel’s history, but also the books we’ll be reading this month: Esther, Ruth, Daniel & Lamentations.

These 4 books were written at different stages of Israel’s history but each one shows how the LORD in complete control of every stage of Israel’s journey. The flow of events in these books often seems to rest on the choices of individuals in difficult circumstances and seemingly random events – but in reality we see God at work using the decisions and actions of imperfect people to move history towards its final fulfilment in Christ.

#### **Ruth**

A key to understanding the book of Ruth is to start reading by reading the last 5 verses of the book. This shows that Ruth is a classic “back story” of how her devotion to the LORD and his people, and the kindness of a man living in sharp contrast to the people of his day (see 1:1), both played their part in the LORD keeping His promises to bring forth a future King.

Ruth is also a beautiful love story that starts with tragedy, but ends with hope as Ruth and Boaz meet and end up marrying; securing their place ultimately in the family line that ultimately leads to not just King David, but also King Jesus.

As you read Ruth, keep in mind that it takes place in the days of the judges when “Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit” (see Judges 21:25).

Watch also for how the Lord uses the most unexpected people to bring about His purposes.

## Esther

The events of the book of Esther take place during a single year of the reign of King Xerxes (486-465BC) a generation before the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. It details God's providential care at a time when the Jewish people were in danger of being wiped out from the earth.

Like Ruth, the book of Esther is notable for its literary style, a beautifully told story from beginning to end with the events of the book unfolding with masterful character development, humour and irony. However, at the same time the book of Esther is the story of God's providential care of his people. As you read the book look out for how many times the LORD is mentioned (this may surprise you) and therefore how God sovereignly yet silently uses the actions of both sinful and courageous individuals - and ordinary and seemingly random events - to save His people.

## Daniel

If Ruth and Esther tell the "behind the scenes" story of God's work in history, Daniel is much more explicit in affirming the fact that the sovereign LORD really is King of Kings, sovereign over the nations. Daniel is essentially a book of two very different halves. The first half being classic "Sunday School" material, the second half leaving even the most knowledgeable scholar scratching their heads.

As you read though Daniel, enjoy the journey of Daniel and his friends as they seek to remain faithful to the LORD during the time of Babylonian captivity. Take note of how it is the LORD of Israel, not the kings of Babylon who are ultimately in charge. Reading through the second half of the book, try not to get bogged down in the details of each of the apocalyptic visions, but look out for themes contrasting the sovereignty of God with how short lived human kingdoms always are.

Chapter 7:9-14 is worth pausing on. In these verses Daniel has a vision of "one like a **son of man** coming with the clouds of heaven". This is a passage that Jesus himself refers back to each time he uses that very same title for himself and explicitly quotes while on trial before the Sanhedrin. *See Mark 14:62.*

## Lamentations

In contrast Lamentations is a very different read. The title of the book comes from the word "to lament", which mean to grieve over a loss or something else that has brought sorry. In the case of Lamentations, that which is being

lamented is the sin that caused the Sovereign LORD to exile his people and bring about the fall of Jerusalem.

It was written soon after the fall of Jerusalem and is structured around five separate laments filled with the deep anguish and spiritual agony as a result of the right judgement of God against the sin of His people.

Yet it is a book of hope. Even in the darkest parts of the book, there are amazing recollections and declarations of the faithfulness and love of God with the hope that one day He will restore His people and bring them back into fellowship with Himself. In Hebrew writing, it is often the central point or argument of a passage or book that is the key point being expressed. It is interesting therefore the main expressions of hope come in the third of the five laments.

The point is clear; if they are to return from exile, it will only be because of the mercy and grace of the sovereign LORD - a theme which points us clearly to Jesus.



## RBT Grow Group is on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June

Bring along some things from your reading of the “writings” to share with others.

### **Some RBT reading ideas:**

- Meet up once a week to read it with a friend.
- Listen online at [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com)
- Write down a verse that struck you that day.
- Encourage someone by texting them a thought from what you’ve read.

### **Grow 1:1 questions to unlock the passage:**

**What** does this teach me about God?

**How** does this point me to the Lord Jesus and His cross?

**What** does this teach me about myself?

**How** does this help me to pray?

**What** difference will this make to my week?



Here are some questions the Bible wants you to ask of itself. Use these to help you as you read your way through this month's book: (please don't feel like you have to fill in every question in loads of detail. These are a guide to help you learn from what you are reading.)

- What did you learn about Jesus and what it means to trust him? (Luke 24:45-47)
- What did you learn about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)
- How were you corrected or rebuked or equipped for every good work? (2 Tim 3:16-17)
- What did you learn from the book that will help you keep going as a follower of Jesus? (Romans 15:4)
- What did you learn that will help you serve and build up the church? (Eph 4:11-16)
- What have you learnt that helps you love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind? (Matt 22:37-40)
- What has helped you love your neighbour as yourself? (Matt 22:37-40)