



DANIEL & ESTHER

JULY 2020

Read on your own or with others,
which ever you prefer.

This leaflet is just a brief overview of the 'big picture' of these books. If you have been reading the Bible for some time you will be aware there is much more to them than you'll find here.

If you are new to reading the Bible don't worry too much if there are details you do not quite get at the moment - focus on the 'big picture'.

INTRODUCTION

These two books deal with events that took place after Judah was invaded by the Babylonian empire and many Jews were exiled away from the promised land, where 2 Kings ends.

When King Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his friends to Babylon, they would have been teenagers at most. Daniel is still there many years later when the Babylonian empire falls to the Persian Empire.

Esther comes later than Daniel. Xerxes is the King of the Persian empire, the superpower of the day. He is based in Susa, one of his main cities, the others being Ecbatana, Babylon and Persepolis.

DANIEL

In modern Bibles, the book of Daniel is found with books of the prophets. The first half would seem to be more at home with the history books of the Old Testament, but the second half is very different; full of predictions of the future and promises of God's kingdom.

Daniel 1-6

These chapters contain 6 dramatic stories of faith which display God's power as he upholds Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. God is clearly in control, even over the might of these great empires.

The four godly men live in a world where it's tough to be faithful to God. Babylon is not a godly kingdom, yet Daniel and his friends refuse to compromise. They faithfully pray and live in obedience to God's word, always trusting in him.

These chapters are an encouragement to us to live for Jesus in our day even when it's hard.

Daniel 7-12

The second half of the book of Daniel contains visions that God gave to Daniel. They are apocalyptic in style, as are parts of Ezekiel and

the book of Revelation. That means, they use dramatic pictures to convey and reveal truth.

To us this literature can seem confusing and complicated, but it doesn't have to be. One thing to remember, look at the big picture and don't get too caught up on the smaller details.

The big sweep of these visions is the rise and fall of 4 different kingdoms in contrast to the permanence of one final and great kingdom. The 4 kingdoms are those of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. As you read about these kingdoms and what would happen to them – they were in the future for Daniel – it can be interesting to look at what happened – they are in our past - and how the visions were fulfilled.

Ultimately, though, the main point is that the kingdom of Jesus will come and will never fail.

ESTHER

The book of Esther is the account of a particular act of God in protecting his people from harm while they were in exile. In a Bible timeline it would sit in the gap in between Ezra 6 and 7. Some of the Jews have returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. However, many still remain in exile.

One extraordinary thing about the book is that God is never actually mentioned. Yet, throughout the sovereignty of God is clearly assumed. Timings and events beyond Mordecai and Esther's control, such as a king who can't sleep (Esther 6:1), point towards someone bigger at work.

As in the book of Daniel, here we see two faithful followers of God living for him in an ungodly land. We see how God uses their willingness to serve him for great good. What an encouragement to us in our time.

Yet, let's not forget the other significance of this book. At its heart is a plan to destroy all the Jews. If that had been successful, where would that have left God's plan to send Jesus?

ASKING THE QUESTIONS THE BIBLE WANTS YOU TO ASK

What does this book teach you about Jesus? (Luke 24:45-47)

What does this book teach you about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you encouraged? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you corrected? (Romans 15:4)

What difference do the truths of this book make in your life (Matthew 7:24-27)