

6 *Daniel 7-12*
The apocalyptic visions contain a whole series of numbers.
Do you think there is some hidden code that we can unlock?
If so, should we try to unravel it?
If not, what is the purpose of all these numbers?

7 *Esther 1-10*
What did you make of the book's underlying morality?
Esther's actions saved her people, yet she was part of a harem, married outside her race, and ruthlessly exacted vengeance on Haman and his family.

Does this have something to say to us about 'sin'?
Or about who can be used to further God's purposes?

8 *Esther 8*
Have there been times when you've wished you could turn back the clock and reverse actions you've taken?
Did you need to apologise for the hurt you'd caused someone as a result of those actions? Was it easy?

9 *Psalm 50*
"Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you"
(v.15). Do you truly believe this for yourself?

10 *Haggai*
Have you experienced being involved in any long-term projects for God and/or his church?
Did you find them to be energizing or frustrating, or both?

Closing

As usual light a candle, silently reflect on the discussion you've had, and pray for God's help in addressing any matters that have arisen for you personally. Finish with the Lord's Prayer.

SACRED

Group Resources

Month 13

Opening Prayer

Good God,
may we confess your name to the end.
May we emerge unsullied and glorious
from the traps and dark powers of this world.
As you have bound us together in love and peace,
and as, together, we have persevered through times of hardship,
may we also rejoice together in your heavenly kingdom.
Amen.

(St. Cyprian of Carthage, c.200-258)

General Questions

- 1 What is the one, single thing you have found to be the most challenging from what you've read this month?
- 2 Daniel and Esther both lived through a time of persecution. The prayer above was written in the year of St. Cyprian's martyrdom, to encourage his fellow Christians under the persecution that was a feature of the third century. The persecution of Christians is still widespread today. We need to pray for those who are suffering. But, is there also a sense in which persecution leads to a stronger church?

Activity

The discipline of waiting on God was foundational to the stories of both Daniel and Esther. This month's 'optional activity' is a simple one. It's to enjoy a time of silent prayer. No music, no candles, no cross – just sitting quietly, praying. But rather than seeking to pray for something or someone specific, just try to still yourself and relax in the presence of God, waiting on him to speak to you. Pray in this way for a set time of between 5 and 10 minutes. Share how this experience was for you with one another.

Further Ideas

As usual, the intention is not necessarily to work through all of these ideas, just to take on some of them as the group chooses.

- 1 *Daniel, Esther, Haggai*
Discuss how the three Old Testament heroes of faith we've encountered this month have particularly inspired you in your own walk of faith.
- 2 *Daniel 3*
The notes regarding the story of the fiery furnace include the sentence: 'our faith should not be dependent on everything going well in our lives.'

As you look back, has this rung true in your own life?
In what ways has your faith kept you going when things were difficult?
- 3 *Daniel 3*
Who do you think was the fourth man walking around in the fire (v.25)? Could it have been Jesus? Are there other times where Jesus may have appeared physically in the Old Testament? How does this impact on your understanding of the incarnation in the gospels?
- 4 *Daniel 1-12*
What patterns do you notice in Daniel's prayer life?

From his example, is there one practical step that you might try to adopt in your own prayer life?
- 5 *Daniel 6*
Now imagine you are living in sixth century BC Babylon. King Darius publishes his decree banning prayer. How do you think *you* will react?