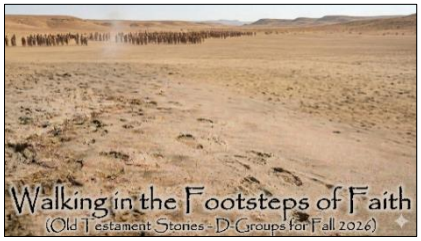
"Walking in the Footsteps of Faith"
OT Stories - Fall 2026 D-Groups



For Wednesday, November 18
ESTHER with MORDECAI, too (Esther 1-10)

The Big Picture - Where We Are in the OT Timeline

As with last week, we're still overall in this **"post-exile"** stage of Israel's history, what unfolds after the Babylonian captivity. The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah focus on the Jewish exiles heading back to Jerusalem - a time of returning, restoring and even rebuilding. **ESTHER's** story fits within this same general timeframe (actually happening from 483-473 B.C., *before* Ezra 7-10 - around 458 B.C. - and before all of Nehemiah - around 445 B.C.). However, instead of being back in Judah, her story takes place in Susa, the capital of the Persian empire. *(Side note: Cyrus the Great, a Persian king, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. - as predicted by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. In fact, Daniel would have witnessed this geo-political shift in power; by the time of Daniel 6, it is Darius, a Persian king who reigns.)* By the time of Esther, the king of Persia is Xerxes, a.k.a., Ahasuerus, the son of King Darius and the maternal grandson of King Cyrus. *Even amidst the Persians' lack of devotion to Yahweh,* the Jewish people found a much friendlier response under them than under the Babylonians. In fact, *perhaps in large degree because of the events of Esther*, there ends up being an obvious amount of favor shown toward the Jews.

Even through this timeframe in the OT story, we should *still* keep it all anchored to Genesis 12:1-3 and the reason for Israel's existence as a nation: to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. During the days of Joseph (soon after that promise), we saw divine providential protection of the line of the Messiah amidst their time with the Egyptians. That theme runs throughout Israel's story, even until the close of the historical books with Esther. Indeed, as in the days of Joseph, Yahweh's fingerprints are obvious, demonstrating His activity in the story of His people *even while they were living under the reign of a foreign nation.* ***His providence does not require His people being in a favorable position for His favor to be on His people!*** That's a big lesson from Esther's story.

The Close-Up for November 18 - Esther 1-10

READ the TEXT: **All of it is a good - and relatively quick (30-45 minutes at a good pace) - read (particularly focus on chapters 4 & 8-10 amidst Haman's plot against the Jews)**

Some notes on the overall flow of the story:

Chapters 1-2 … through a unique process (aided by Mordecai's wisdom along the way), Esther becomes queen, positioning her in a great spot of influence (the end of chapter 2 contains an aside that actually becomes important later in the story as Mordecai, Esther's uncle, uncovers a plot against the king, saving his life - an event that is recorded in a book and later rewarded by King Xerxes).

Chapter 3 … amidst conflict with Mordecai because of his refusal to bow before Haman, he develops a plot to exterminate the Jewish people (see the wording of 3:13 which becomes

language used all the way throughout) - Xerxes signs off on the decree, unaware of the implications, including for his new queen, Esther, who had kept her ethnicity hidden.

Chapter 4 (a key chapter!) … Mordecai appeals to Esther to act and intercede on behalf of her people *even though it was risky*; notice the words of faith in 4:14. She steps up and appears before the king, setting the stage for the rest of the story.

Chapters 5-7 … the turning point - filled with irony as what Haman intends for Mordecai becomes what Haman receives while Mordecai receives what Haman intended for himself.

Chapters 8-10 … a second decree giving the Jews the freedom to fight back - victory becomes theirs against their enemies (leading to the feast of *Purim*) - by the end of the story, as in Daniel, Mordecai ends up in an elevated position as a result of it all.

An Interesting Feature of the Story: while divine fingerprints are all over the story *(consider the "coincidences" that unfold, even the irony)*, there is no direct mention of God, His Name or His involvement in the story. Incidentally, that's how we often experience His providence. While we cannot see Him directly, His presence and activity are obvious in the story!

A Reflection: the story of Esther actually comes before the story of Ezra/Nehemiah (we're out-of-order chronologically from last week to this week). **This points toward a broader demonstration of God's providence: because of Esther's role, not only does God use her to save His people from Haman's plot, that seems to contribute to the broader "favor" that the Jewish people came to receive during the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah under King Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes.**

Two Key Reminders throughout This Semester

1. **God is ultimately the HERO of these stories; remember, as part of Scripture, God is *revealing* Himself to us. *So, what do we learn about Him through this story? What can we learn from the human characters about putting our faith/trust in Him?***
2. **We read these stories through a Christ-lens. *So, how do we read this story differently in light of Jesus and being His followers?***

Some Additional Questions for Reflection

- ***As you reflect on Esther's story (Mordecai's, too), what stands out about a response of faith to God and His promise? In your own story, when it comes to both your initial faith in Jesus and your ongoing life of faith, what does this story teach us about trusting Him?***
- ***How were the Jewish people still "underdogs" during the reign of the Persians? How does God work on their behalf even then? What lessons can we learn from that in those situations where we might think our circumstances are not all that favorable?***
- ***Why do you think God's Name is hidden from the story, even though His fingerprints are everywhere in it? How does that fit with the way we experience His providence in life and how we're called to trust Him even when He's unseen?***
- ***How does faith require the courage both to act without a guarantee of a certain earthly outcome* and *to do so with confidence that an unseen God will be at work?***