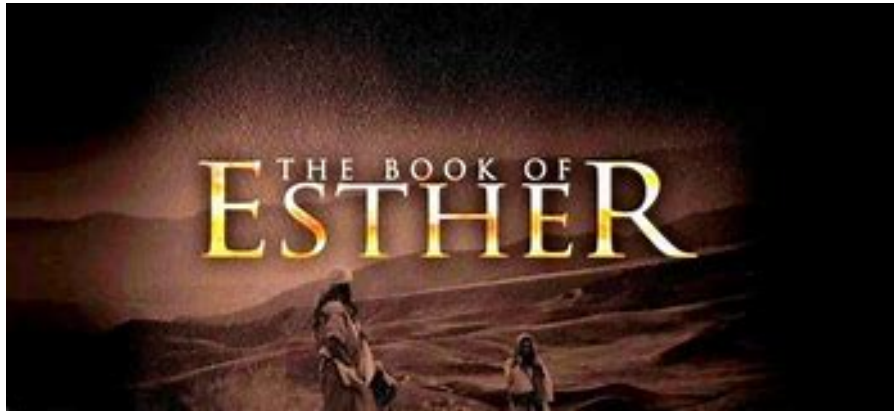


(107) Adult Sunday School Class
Esther, chpts. 1-10
Chronicles, pp. 143-155



The story of Esther takes place in the Persian capital city of Susa (present day Iran) during the reign of king Xerxes (485-465 BC). The time period is about 30-40 years before Ezra and Nehemiah left Persia for Jerusalem, respectively.

While the story of Esther is an easy first-pass read, when we dig a little deeper, we find this Biblical story actually more challenging to interpret. First of all, the name of God is never mentioned in the entire book and none of the characters ever pray or enquire of God. In fact, there does not seem to be much spiritual awareness at all. Secondly, the names of the hero and heroine are disturbing. Mordecai's name probably meant "man of Marduck," the name of the primary god of the Babylonians. Similarly, the name Esther is probably derived from Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love. So, what's the point?

Well, beyond the first-pass read of the fairy tale plot of "Jewish orphan girl wins beauty contest, marries the king, and saves her people from genocide," the book of Esther illustrates the dismal spiritual condition of the Jews in exile. None are portrayed as praying, sacrificing, worshipping, or acknowledging God in any way. Yet, God still worked powerfully behind the scenes through Mordecai and Esther to deliver the Jews from total annihilation because of His grace and covenant promises to Abraham and David. *(Note: It is from this exiled Jewish population, with near non-existent faith in God, that soon return with Ezra and Nehemiah to re-build Jerusalem).*

Queen Esther was quite brave in her own right and much can be learned from her. But the primary lesson from this book is that God often works quietly behind the scenes to implement His plan. And this is still true today... God often works in our lives even when we do not deserve it. God is faithful to His promises and this should give us great encouragement even in difficult times!