Esther Issue 1 Leader Guide

The Crown Alone | Adult group sample | 75 to 90 minutes

Lead one complete conversation through Esther 1:1-2:4 and all 17 story pages of Issue 1. The aim is to notice how royal decisions reach ordinary lives, distinguish the Bible from the comic's additions, and choose one way to treat people affected by our decisions with greater care.

Prepare before the group

Allow about 30 minutes. Read the passage and Issue 1, then this guide. Bring Bibles, the participant handout, pens, and readable copies of the comic or a tested display. Choose two Scripture readers and a timekeeper. Participants need no prior homework.

Edition and page numbers. This guide follows Issue 1 canon v1.7.2, The Crown Alone. References below are story pages 1-17; in the 20-page reading PDF, add 2. Scripture appears on physical pages 2 and 20. Use the reading edition, not the imposed print file.

Before displaying pages 8-9, know that they imagine a degrading, partly unclothed royal display. Page 14 includes battle injury; page 16 depicts forced separation. Tell the group briefly, allow anyone to skip an image, and invite discussion without personal disclosure.

Use this 75 minute route

Elapsed	Minutes	Together you will
0-8	8	Welcome and brief check-in
8-13	5	Explain the reading habit and human focus
13-18	5	Read Esther 1:1-12
18-30	12	Read comic story pages 1-9
30-38	8	Pause at the summons and compare
38-43	5	Read Esther 1:13-2:4
43-60	17	Read story pages 10-17 with brief stops
60-70	10	Discuss and choose a response
70-75	5	Pray and close

For 90 minutes, add five minutes each to check-in, the first comic reading, and the final discussion. If time slips, shorten comments between panels. Protect both Scripture readings, the comparison, and the closing response.

Lead the first half

Welcome and introduce the reading habit

Invite each person to share their name and one thing occupying their mind this week. Passing is welcome. In a larger group, start in pairs and hear a few brief responses.

Suggested opening. "We will read Scripture and a graphic story together. The art helps us notice people we might pass over: a worker, a servant, a family, a queen. We can care about them while being honest about what the text tells us and what the artist imagined."

John Koenig's modern word sonder describes recognizing the complexity of other people's lives. Use it as an invitation to attention, not as a biblical term. The creative aim is to let these people feel as close as a sister, brother, aunt, or uncle, so their choices and losses carry weight.

Use four questions throughout: What does Scripture say? What can history establish? What does the comic imagine? How might we respond? Label a teacher's interpretation as interpretation; a plausible explanation is not a stated fact.

Read Esther 1 verses 1 to 12

Ask listeners to notice the scale of the display, who receives an invitation, and who makes decisions. Read from the group's chosen translation. Ahasuerus is the king called Xerxes in the comic; Susa is the royal setting. Give newcomers room to find the passage.

Ask briefly: "Which details does the narrator emphasize?" Receive observations before explanations. The feast's purpose as preparation for a Greek war is not stated in this passage.

Read story pages 1 to 9

Let the dialogue flow. Invite volunteers to read captions and characters, or allow quiet reading. Pause only at these landmarks; readers do not need a teaching point after every panel.

Pages 1-3. The street, palace workers, and broken sandal turn a vast empire into individual lives. Ask: "Who did you notice?" Ada's family and the worker exchanges are dramatic inventions.

Pages 4-7. Move through the royal display and both banquets. Notice the hands serving the feast. Specific guest conversations and Xerxes' speech about Greece are imagined.

Pages 8-9. Give the image notice, then pause. The large thought-shaped image portrays the threatened display in imagination; Vashti has not actually appeared before the men. Her refusal is on page 10.

Pause and compare

Give a quiet minute. Ask: "What has verse 12 already told us? What does the comic make us anticipate? Whose choices are constrained?" The text gives a crown, summons, and refusal; it gives no reason for Vashti's refusal and does not say she was ordered to wear only the crown. Keep the distinction explicit.

Lead the second half

Read Esther 1 verse 13 through 2 verse 4

Ask listeners to follow the speakers: the king, the advisers, Memucan, the attendants, and the narrator. “Whose concern becomes the reason for the decree?” Let the passage establish the sequence before returning to the images.

Read story pages 10 to 17

Page 10 The refusal. Vashti refuses; the king becomes angry. Ask: “What does the Bible leave unanswered about her?” Her exact words, private thoughts, and the physical display of the king’s anger are dramatized. Do not turn a guessed motive into an answer key.

Pages 11-13 The decree. Memucan treats the refusal as a threat reaching every household. Ask: “How does a palace conflict become this family’s problem?” On page 13, follow the translated orders, courier and child, public reading, and family reaction.

Keep the speakers clear. Esther 1:16-22 reports Memucan’s argument and royal action. It does not present the decree as God’s instruction for families. The courier’s conversation and the household reactions are invented ways to make consequences visible.

Page 14 The Greek campaign. Keep this to one minute. The comic shows a canal at Athos, boat bridges over the Hellespont, and fighting at Salamis. These belong to the historical setting outside Esther. The book never names this war or says defeat caused the search for a new queen.

If asked: Athos is a peninsula in northern Greece; the canal crossed its narrow neck. The Hellespont, now the Dardanelles, separates Asia from Europe. Herodotus describes these preparations. Exact conversations, individual laborers, and the king’s homecoming scene are the comic’s reconstruction.

Page 15 The search. Compare 2:1-4 with the sleepless king and his attendants. The proposal to gather women is in the passage. War memories and the suggestion that a queen could help him forget two losses are dramatic interpretation.

Page 16 The departure. Sarai is a fictional young woman, not Esther. Her family scene anticipates the gathering of women in 2:8, beyond this session’s main passage. Ask: “What can her family still offer when they cannot stop her leaving?”

Page 17 The door. Let the final knock stand without explaining the next issue. The two figures inside remain unnamed in Issue 1. Ask: “What question makes you want to continue?”

Keep the conversation open

If someone supplies a motive, ask which verse or image supports it. If they know the ending, thank them and save it for later. If a painful experience is shared, listen without pressing for details; arrange appropriate private follow-up. No one needs to disclose an experience to participate.

Discuss and close

Give the group ten minutes to respond

Start with one quiet minute on the participant handout, then invite two or three voices. Choose the questions the reading has made most alive; completing every question is unnecessary.

1 Which person became more real to you? Ask for the page or detail that changed their attention. A worker, courier, family member, or Vashti are all useful starting points.

2 Where did the comic add something Scripture does not say? Invite one example and its effect. The goal is careful reading, not deciding that every addition is wrong.

3 What happens when embarrassment becomes a decision affecting other people? Follow the sequence from refusal to advisers to decree. Ask whose voice is absent from the decision.

4 Whose experience could you listen to before a decision this week? Invite a small, concrete action. A private answer is enough; do not use the story to prescribe a response to someone else's unsafe situation.

Leave room for a faith question

If the group asks where God is, acknowledge that this passage does not explain God's intention behind the events. Readers often approach the whole book through providence, but that is a theological reading to explore as the story unfolds. Do not claim that God endorses the king's actions or that we can explain another person's suffering.

Optional for a 90-minute group: read Philippians 2:3-4 alongside the closing response. Ask what attending to another person's interests could look like in one ordinary decision. Label this a Christian application from another passage, not a quotation or stated lesson from Esther 1.

Close in five minutes

Invite a brief prayer request or a quiet moment. Suggested prayer: "God, help us notice the people affected by our choices. Give us humility to listen, wisdom when we have influence, and care for those who have little room to choose. Amen."

Afterward, record what needed extra explanation, whether you finished in time, and what participants wanted to read next. If continuing, invite Esther 2:1-18 and Issue 2. This package supplies this session only.

Sources and further reading

Primary reading: Esther 1:1-2:4; 2:8 for the stated anticipation. Page landmarks follow the approved Issue 1 v1.7.2 script and reading edition. No Bible translation text is reproduced here.

Esther 1 and notes | USCCB

Esther 2 | USCCB

Susa and its archaeological setting | UNESCO

Ahasuerus and the Xerxes identification | Encyclopaedia Iranica

Sonder | John Koenig

Herodotus Book 7 sections 22 to 24 and 34 to 36 | LacusCurtius

Athos and Hellespont: Herodotus, Histories 7.22-24 and 7.34-36. Ancient accounts inform the context; they do not verify the comic's individual scenes. USCCB includes Greek additions separately; this session uses numbered chapters 1-2.