Esther Issue 2 Reading and Discussion Guide

The Hidden Queen | Esther 2:5-23 | Individual reading or a 90 minute group session

Use this guide alongside Issue 2 and Esther 2:5-23 to explore family, identity, life within the palace's limits, and actions that protect a life. Read on your own or with a group; no prior study or particular faith background is required.

A suggested group reading route

Suggested time	Reading and discussion
18 minutes	Share a recent high, low, or question. Passing is welcome.
10 minutes	Recap Issue 1, return to Sonder, and read inside front: Esther 2:5-14.
17 minutes	Read comic pages 1-7; then read Esther 2:15-18 from the back Scripture page.
15 minutes	Read comic pages 8-13; pause at the coronation centerfold.
20 minutes	Read Esther 2:19-23 from the back; follow comic pages 14-25.
10 minutes	Compare the biblical text and comic, choose a practical response, and reflect. Prayer is optional.

Sonder after the palace door closes

John Koenig's modern word sonder reminds us that every person has a life as vivid and complex as our own. Issue 1 shows people affected by royal orders. Issue 2 follows people after an order changes their lives.

Before she is a queen, Esther is Hadassah: a cousin, an adopted daughter, and someone whose parents have died. The comic also gives faces to people the Bible leaves unnamed. Those imagined lives can deepen our attention while we keep asking what the text actually tells us.

Notice one person besides Esther as you read. What can that person choose? What can't they choose? What kind of care might matter to them?

A useful reading habit

Scripture: What is stated? History: What can outside evidence establish? Comic: What is imagined? Interpretation: What does a teacher infer? Response: How might we live differently?

Comic references use the numbered story pages. The centerfold is story pages 12-13 (PDF/booklet pages 14-15). A digital reader's PDF page number is the story page plus 2.

Read Esther online

esther.gappjunction.com

Scan to explore the website. To read complete issues, choose Sign in or Create account, then Read Esther. Select Issue 2 to accompany this guide.

Explore Watch, For groups, and Behind the story. Save your recovery key when creating an account.

Esther in the Biblical and Persian World

The story takes place in Susa, a Persian royal center in today's southwest Iran. Judah's exile lies behind this family: Jerusalem's first temple had been destroyed, Persia later permitted return, and the Second Temple had been rebuilt. Some Jews returned; other Jewish communities continued living across the empire.

The timeline we are following

Date in Esther	Approximate BCE	Event and passage
Year 3	483-482	Royal display and feasts; Vashti is removed (1:3-22).
Year 7, Tebeth Month 10	479-478	Esther is brought to the king and crowned queen (2:16-18). This issue reaches this point.
Year 12, Nisan Month 1; Nisan 13	474	**To be revealed in a later issue**
Sivan 23 Month 3	c. 474	**To be revealed in a later issue**
Adar 13-15 Month 12	c. 473	**To be revealed in a later issue**

BCE dates are approximate conversions using the usual identification of Ahasuerus as Xerxes I. Tebeth falls in winter; the issue's NLT footnote gives December 479-January 478 BCE. The later shaded dates remain visible for orientation.

Inside this chapter

Twelve months of preparation: six with myrrh, then six with perfumes and ointments (2:12). This is the women's preparation period, not the whole gap between chapters 1 and 2. The plot in 2:21-23 has no separate month or regnal year stated.

History beside the story

Thermopylae and Salamis occurred in 480 BCE; Plataea and Mycale followed in 479. These campaigns fall between the third-year feast and seventh-year coronation in the usual chronology. Esther does not say the war caused the search for a queen.

Excavations at Susa reveal the palace of Darius and a real imperial setting. They do not verify the comic's rooms, private conversations, or wedding ceremony. Evidence about Persian women is varied; Esther's custody scenes should not be treated as a complete picture of every woman's life in Persia.

Words that help us read

Word	Meaning in this discussion
Diaspora	A people living outside their ancestral homeland; here, Jews living beyond Judah.
Harem / concubines	The royal women's household and women attached to the king. In 2:14, custody changes and a return requires his summons.
Eunuch	A male court attendant, commonly castrated, who could hold considerable responsibility. These officials manage access and custody.
Chronicle	The official written record of the king's reign, where the warning is entered (2:23).

People in Issue 2

A name and a role are a starting point. Notice relationships, pressures, and each person's choices. The written labels distinguish people named in the Bible from characters or names created for the comic.



Esther

BIBLICAL

Hadassah, Mordecai's orphaned cousin and adopted daughter; taken into royal custody and chosen as queen (2:7-17).



Mordecai

BIBLICAL

Esther's cousin and adoptive father. Seeks news daily, learns of the plot, and sends a warning (2:7,11,21-22).



Hegai

BIBLICAL

Official caring for the women before their royal visit. Favors Esther and advises her; his private motive is unstated (2:8-9,15).



Shaashgaz

BIBLICAL

Royal eunuch responsible for the concubines after the women's visits to the king (2:14).



Sarai

INVENTED

Esther's friend in the comic. Her story keeps a woman who does not become queen in view. She is not Esther.



Tirah

INVENTED NAME

One of Esther's seven attendants in the comic. The seven attendants are biblical; their names and conversations are added (2:9).



Xerxes

BIBLICAL / HISTORICAL

Ahasuerus, commonly identified with Xerxes I. Chooses Esther, holds a feast, and receives the warning (2:16-23).



Hathach

BIBLICAL NAME

Esther's messenger in the comic. Named later in Scripture; this particular chapter 2 assignment is invented.



Bigthana

BIBLICAL

One of two royal door guards who become angry and plot against the king; also spelled Bigthan (2:21).



Teresh

BIBLICAL

The other guard in the plot. The comic invents the grievance, conversations, and escape arrangements (2:21-23).



Daryav

INVENTED

Official directing the comic's investigation. Scripture reports an inquiry without naming its investigator (2:23).



Neriah

INVENTED

Records worker in the comic. Helps make the palace's ordinary work and the recording of the warning visible.

Also appearing: Ada and her household, officers Tardu and Rustam, and server Mitra are invented. Harbona is a biblical name, with an invented interruption here. Tirah's six fellow attendants are Piri, Luma, Eshara, Maya, Belati, and Nisa; those names are invented.

Lucy, the small bird, is an artistic motif. Spotting her can be fun; Scripture does not identify her as a sign or a messenger.

Read Scripture and the Comic Together

The comic follows the chapter's main events and adds scenes that let us feel their effects. Use the differences below as discussion openings. An imagined scene can be meaningful without becoming a claim about what happened.

Passage and comic pages	Scripture gives us	The comic adds or chooses
2:5-11 Pages 1-4	Family, adoption, royal custody, secrecy, Hegai's favor, and Mordecai's daily concern.	The knock, packing, needles, neighbors, exact gate conversations, and Sarai's friendship.
2:9,12 Pages 4-5	Seven attendants and twelve months of treatments.	The attendants' names, sewing and shared work, movement lessons, and speaking practice.
2:12-14 Pages 6-7	The evening visit, transfer the next morning, custody under Shaashgaz, and recall by name.	Sarai's whole story and feelings. "For life" is the adaptation's inference; the verse gives no explicit legal life sentence.
2:15-18 Pages 8-14	Esther follows Hegai's advice; the king loves her, crowns her, and celebrates.	Clothing details, private conversation, breakfast, rehearsal joke, and a particular public wedding ceremony.
2:21 Page 15	Bigthana and Teresh become angry and plot to kill the king.	Their mentor's death, the guest incident, and the 50 lashes. These are invented reasons for their anger.
No stated episode Page 16	No scene of Esther sending food to a friend.	The warm date bread and Sarai's response: an imagined act of care after Esther's rise.
2:19-22 Pages 17-19	Mordecai learns of danger; Esther reports it and credits him.	The clerk's task, overheard words, relief guards, route, and Hathach's particular role as messenger.
2:23 Pages 20-23	An investigation confirms the report; the guards are executed.	Daryav, clues, witnesses, and violent questioning. The NLT uses impalement; exact apparatus and mechanics are reconstructed.
2:23 Pages 24-25	The event is entered in the royal record.	An interrupted reward conversation and a departing delegation. Chapter 2 does not explain an omitted reward.

Two details to hold together

The text reports the king's love for Esther (2:17); it does not describe her feelings in the same way. The crown changes her position, while the story still contains loss, secrecy, and people with limited choices.

Understanding the guards' pain in the comic can deepen our attention to them. It does not excuse a plan to kill. The Bible's short report gives fewer details than the adaptation.

Ideas to Consider

What to notice	A response to consider
Care is often ordinary and persistent Esther 2:7,11	Mordecai raises Esther and seeks news each day. Who needs a steady check-in, a meal, or someone willing to listen?
A person is more than a role Esther 2:7,10,20	Queen, guardian, servant, or guard does not tell a whole life. Ask before assuming that comfort or status means someone is free of struggle.
Integrity includes protecting and crediting others Esther 2:21-23	Mordecai warns; Esther names her source; the report is investigated and recorded. Tell the truth carefully and give credit where it belongs.

An optional faith reflection

Providence means God's sustaining and guiding care. Christian readers often see providence working through ordinary relationships in Esther. The Hebrew narrative does not explicitly name God or explain each event as his action. For readers exploring faith, the story invites trust and care without calling suffering good or promising that faithfulness will earn a crown.

Interpretations to Explore

Dr. Bill Creasy makes the family and court relationships vivid. He reads Hegai's quick favor as recognizing a likely future queen and cultivating her goodwill. Verse 9 states Hegai's kindness and provisions; his inner calculation is Creasy's interpretation.

Traditional readings emphasize providence, Jewish life in exile, and faithful service. Literary readings also notice who has power, whose identity is hidden, and what the narrator leaves unsaid. Those lenses can work together when we distinguish observation from inference.

Questions for discussion or reflection

- Whose life became more real to you in this issue? Which detail did Scripture give, and which did the comic supply?
- At the crown, what has changed for Esther? What has not changed for Sarai or the other women?
- What does Esther's giving Mordecai credit show us about using influence? What could that look like this week?

A small response this week

Someone I will notice or support: _____

One concrete action I will take: _____

Optional Christian companion readings: Romans 12:15 and Philippians 2:3-4. Continue with Issue 3 when ready; there is no need to read ahead for this discussion.

Sources for further reading

Bible: Esther 2:5-23 and the NLT footnotes printed in Issue 2 v2.14. Comic: The Hidden Queen and its companion teaching notes. Interpretation: Dr. Bill Creasy's teaching on Esther, paraphrased and distinguished from the biblical text.

Esther 2 and notes (USCCB) | NET Bible notes on Esther | Susa archaeology (UNESCO) | Greece and Persia (Iranica) | Women in ancient Persia (Iranica)