Esther Issue 3 Leader Session Plan

The Man Who Would Not Bow | Thursday October 15, 2026 | 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Tonight's aim: help the group feel the lives beneath the decree, distinguish Esther 3 from the adaptation's choices, and consider how conscience and authority affect neighbors. Use the named v3.5.1 print edition: 29 story pages / 32 physical pages.

The 90 minute plan

Clock	Minutes	Facilitation
7:00-7:18	18	Circle check-in: highs, lows, significant events, fun facts, and prayer requests. Aim for 60-90 seconds each; passing is welcome.
7:18-7:23	5	Give the recap and Sonder prompt below. Set the three reading questions.
7:23-7:27	4	Read inside front, Esther 3:1-5. Note that story pages 1-10 imagine the preceding interval.
7:27-7:49	22	Walk story pages 1-13 panel by panel. Brief discussion stops after 3 and 9; keep the friendship scenes moving naturally.
7:49-7:56	7	Read centerfold pages 14-15; allow a quiet minute, then invite two or three responses.
7:56-8:01	5	Turn to the back and read Esther 3:6-15. Let the decree's inclusion of children register.
8:01-8:19	18	Follow story pages 16-29. Brief pause after 20; protect the final facing opening, pages 28-29.
8:19-8:27	8	Return to 3:15. Ask for one biblical observation, one comic addition, and one practical response.
8:27-8:30	3	Pray with the needs already shared, naming care, truth, and those under threat.

Open in your own voice

"Last time Esther became queen, Mordecai reported danger, and the warning was entered in the royal record. Tonight the palace's ordinary work continues. We'll meet people who use influence in very different ways. Choose one person beyond the two men in the title scene: someone working, waiting, writing, or trying to care for a friend. Watch what royal decisions mean inside that person's life."

Prepare and protect the pace

Mark story pages 3, 9, 14-15, 20, and 28-29. Story number + 2 = physical PDF page; centerfold is physical 16-17. Choose two Scripture readers. Read every panel, but discuss only at selected stops; leave silent panels a few quiet seconds.

Three recurring questions: What is stated? What is imagined? Whose life is affected? The handout is a reference, not five pages to lecture through. Keep history to a short orientation and answer the rest if asked.

If check-in reaches 20 minutes, use a three-minute recap. If the comic runs long, take one answer after page 9 and omit the page 20 pause. Protect Scripture, the centerfold, the last two pages, closing response, and prayer.

Read Esther online

esther.gappjunction.com

Scan to explore the site. Choose Sign in or Create account, then Read Esther for available digital issues. Save your recovery key when creating an account.

Guide the First Half

Read 3:1-5 before beginning the comic. Pages 1-10 are the adaptation's imagined background to Haman's promotion, not a missing biblical chapter. Use the printed story numbers in this guide.

Pages	Notice and distinguish	A question or brief cue
1-3	Haman solves a real payment problem. Mordecai checks a disputed record and finishes the work. Both episodes and exact job details are invented.	PAUSE AFTER 3: "Whose needs are met in these scenes? What do the two men do with the authority they have?" Take two answers.
4-5	Haman gains direct access; Esther welcomes guests and makes time for Sarai. The hospitality, sour fruit, and conversations are added.	Let warmth and humor breathe. A quick cue: "What does Esther remember about the people around her?" Do not turn every kindness into a plot prediction.
6-9	Vardun protects workers; Haman reroutes supplies but omits the safety reason in his report. Xerxes dismisses Vardun. This entire bridge sequence is invented.	PAUSE AFTER 9: "What fact was left out? What did that omission cost Vardun? What is different about Mordecai's record?"
10-11	The comic shows reports being routed through Haman, then reaches the biblical promotion (3:1). The closed chronicle recalls 2:23.	Do not open the chronicle's future role. Ask only what the reader already knows: a service was recorded and another man now receives rank.
12-13	The royal bowing order, daily pressure, and Mordecai's Jewish identity come from 3:2-4. The sewing scenes, coworker names, and word "Lower" are added.	Keep attention on people with different pressures. Bagai fears consequences for himself; his exact anxiety is the adaptation's interpretation.

The seven minute centerfold pause

Use story pages 14-15 as the open spread. Read the two upper exchanges, then let the lower confrontation remain silent. Give the group one quiet minute to look before inviting two or three voices.

- What does each man appear to want? Which parts of your answer come from the words, and which come from the drawing?
- Where do you see power, fear, pride, or resolve? What pressures might the watching officials feel?
- What does verse 5 actually tell us about Haman? What does the narrator leave unsaid about Mordecai's inner reasoning?

Return briefly to 3:2,4-5. Scripture states the refusal, Jewish identity, observation, and rage. The confrontation's precise words and visual staging are invented. Transition: "Now let's read how one man's anger reaches beyond one man."

Care in the room

Tonight's second half describes an order to kill an entire Jewish people, including children. Read it soberly. Anyone may pass or take a moment. Invite observation of the story; personal disclosure is optional. If a member shares something painful, listen and offer a private conversation after group.

Guide the Second Half

Read the back cover, 3:6-15, at 7:56. Continue the comic at story page 16. Keep the aim on the passage and people; brief factual answers can wait until after the final opening.

Pages	Notice and distinguish	A question or brief cue
16-17	The comic gives Mordecai an explicit religious conscience, fear, and a family discussion of Agag. Esther 3 gives Jewish identity but not those speeches. The attack on all Jews is biblical (3:6).	One sentence is enough: "The comic chooses a motive we can discuss; the narrator is less explicit." Haman chooses collective violence; do not blame the families.
18	The lot and the first/twelfth months are in 3:7. Devices and exact dialogue are reconstructed. Nisan to Adar leaves nearly a year before the scheduled attack.	Define pur as lot, purim as lots. Do not preview the later festival or imply the lot makes Haman's plan morally legitimate.
19-20	Haman generalizes from a dispute to accusations against a people. The offer, signet, and royal authorization are in 3:8-11.	OPTIONAL PAUSE AFTER 20: "What would the king need to ask before agreeing? What does giving away his seal make possible?" Keep to two responses.
21-23	The decree's language, inclusion of children, plunder, translation, and seal follow 3:12-14. The named clerks, pause, and courier exchange are invented.	Let the clerk's pause remain short and uncomfortable. Do not label it resistance: in the comic he continues. What is being made routine?
24-27	Public proclamation and Susa's distress are biblical. Neriah's private report and the family are invented. Joel brings home words from the public notice.	Track knowledge: the public receives the decree; the comic supplies a source for Mordecai's information. Esther has not been told in this issue.
28-29	The drinking court and unsettled city come from 3:15. The family at its own table is the adaptation's particular example.	Leave both pages open together. Give 30-45 quiet seconds. Then ask: "What changes when we move from one table to the other?" Stop before chapter 4.

Use the final eight minutes well

Spend about three minutes at the two tables. Ask whose experience stayed with members and what Scripture supplies. Spend three minutes on one application question, then allow one quiet minute to write a response on the member sheet. Use the remaining minute to gather two short responses.

Closing question: "Where might I need to hear a fuller account, question a harmful generalization, or stay close to someone who is afraid?" Let members choose one concrete act of truthful care rather than promise a dramatic confrontation.

Close in prayer

"God, help us see the people our words and decisions touch. Give us humility to hear a fuller account, courage to tell the truth, and patience to stay beside those who are afraid. Guard us from anger that makes neighbors into enemies. Teach us to use our influence with care, even when we cannot yet see the outcome. Amen."

Include the group's own prayer needs. Next issue begins the response in Esther 4; leave that action for its own meeting.

Teacher Notes on Text and Interpretation

Use Dr Creasy as a guide

In the supplied transcript, the chapter 3 discussion begins just before the 25:00 marker and continues into the following block. For preparation, start at “Now, chapter three” and stop at the city’s bewilderment before chapter 4. The approximate useful interval is 24-28 minutes. The Agag discussion appears later, after the 55:00 marker; that wider lecture includes major later events.

Contribution to keep	Qualification for tonight
Public refusal is costly. Creasy connects it with faithful allegiance to God.	Esther 3:4 gives Mordecai’s Jewish identity, not a full argument about worship. The comic’s duty-to-God speech is an adaptation of an interpretation.
The proposal makes an entire people a target and uses promised property as an incentive.	Name the genocidal scope and anti-Jewish hatred clearly. Avoid a claim that this is demonstrably the first such plan in world history.
Agag and Saul give the story an older biblical memory.	1 Samuel 15 does not narrate an escaping family or provide Haman’s full genealogy. The transcript’s family-survival explanation goes beyond those verses.
God’s care may be contemplated even when not named.	Providence is a theological reading. Esther 3 does not explain every event as God’s direct action or promise that conscience prevents suffering.

The transcript is AI-assisted with approximate markers; paraphrase it instead of presenting the wording as a certified quotation. Do not import its later-book explanations into tonight’s ending.

Other readings that enrich the discussion

Traditional Christian reading: conscience before God, the danger of pride, and providence amid threats. Develop these through the passage rather than treating every added conversation as a proof text.

Jewish and literary reading: Mordecai’s Benjamin/Kish ancestry and Haman’s Agagite label recall Saul and Agag. The contrast between Mordecai’s prior service and Haman’s unexplained promotion is also striking. These are meaningful textual patterns; the grain-and-bridge explanation is the comic’s new causal story.

NET Bible notes and the USCCB note on 3:2 both acknowledge that the reason for the refusal is not fully stated. David bows to Saul in 1 Samuel 24:8, so avoid saying that Jewish people never bowed to human beings. Some readers emphasize worship, others Amalekite memory or communal identity.

Keep responsibility clear

The book links Haman’s rage to the refusal, but Haman decides to enlarge the conflict and Xerxes authorizes the decree. The threatened Jewish people are its victims. An inherited biblical conflict does not make children guilty or provide a rule for treating a present-day people as enemies.

Answers and Background to Keep Ready

How much of the opening is biblical

Scripture moves from the recorded warning in 2:23 to Haman's promotion in 3:1 without explaining why he was promoted. Story pages 1-10 supply a substantial imagined bridge. His payment of drivers is helpful; his later omission damages Vardun. Neither incident is an independently established Persian event.

What does archaeology add

Susa's excavated palace and administrative remains anchor the setting. The Persepolis Fortification Archive shows real Persian institutions managing food and using seals; it comes from another site and largely an earlier reign. It supports the administrative background, not the comic's exact paper forms, bridge procedure, or named officials. Spend no more than a minute on this unless asked.

What is the date of the threatened attack

The biblical date is Adar 13; the decree is written on Nisan 13 in Xerxes' twelfth year (3:7,12-13). Under the usual Xerxes identification, the printed NLT notes give April 17, 474 BCE and March 7, 473 BCE. Present those as that edition's calendar conversions. Esther's coronation to the casting of lots is about four years and three months, not another four years after the comic's early scenes.

Did Haman pay the money and where did he get it

Verse 9 reports a promise; it does not give an account of a completed transfer or the silver's source. Verse 11 is interpreted differently across translations and commentaries. Read the supplied NLT wording and leave the accounting open. Avoid a modern dollar equivalent or treating a proposed source in confiscated property as explicit fact.

Why is God mentioned in the comic but not the passage

The family conversation voices the adaptation's faith and conscience interpretation. It is added dialogue. The Hebrew form of Esther does not explicitly name God, whereas editions with Greek additions include explicit prayers. Readers may discuss God's hidden care without changing what this passage actually says.

Should we call Mordecai either brave or reckless

Invite the group to consider the cost and the limited explanation. Traditional readings honor his conscience; the narrative also makes its consequences frightening. He does not foresee the decree in this issue. Do not make speculative certainty about his motives a requirement for learning from the passage.

Sources and further reading

Comic and Scripture: Issue 3 print edition v3.5.1, sent October 15; its supplied NLT text and footnotes cover Esther 3:1-15. Comic page numbers throughout mean the printed story numbers. Dr. Bill Creasy: supplied Book of Esther transcript; wording is paraphrased and time markers are approximate.

Esther 3 notes (USCCB) | Esther 3 notes (NET Bible) | Susa archaeology (UNESCO) | Persepolis records (Stolper, pp. 92-102)

Additional comparison: Rabbi Yonatan Grossman, The Attempted Rebellion Against the King, and the Promotion of Haman (Yeshivat Har Etzion). It develops the Kish/Agag literary connection; it is an interpretive reading.

Read the Jewish literary commentary

Use the numbered Hebrew-story chapters when comparing editions that include Greek additions. Scripture is referenced here; read the supplied NLT passage in the comic or your own Bible.