Esther Issue 5 Group Handout

The Sleepless Night | Thursday, November 5, 2026 | 7:00–8:30 p.m.

Tonight's passage is Esther 5:2–6:14. Last week Esther stood in the inner court, waiting for the king to move. Open Issue 5 to the same doorway. Tonight, watch what one night does for Mordecai, and ask what it changes for the family who sees him ride past.

Tonight's route

Time	Together we will
7:00–7:18	Around the room. Share a high, a low, a surprise, or a prayer request. You can pass.
7:18–7:26	Remember where Issue 4 stopped. Choose a person to follow. Read the inside front cover, Esther 5:2–6:5.
7:26–7:33	Turn to handout p. 5. Find the four Hebrew letters Dr. Creasy noticed in Esther's invitation (5:4).
7:33–7:54	Read story pp. 1–11 in order. Pause at the centerfold. What does the king want, and what has Haman come to ask?
7:54–7:58	Read the back cover, Esther 6:6–14. Listen for the name Haman expects and the name the king gives.
7:58–8:17	Read story pp. 12–21. Hear the proclamation in the square, then listen to the child at the workshop.
8:17–8:30	Turn to handout p. 6. Discuss one question, choose a response for the week, and pray together.

Sonder at the edge of the parade

John Koenig coined "sonder" for the realization that a stranger has an inner life as complex as your own. Imagine that the child at the repair counter is your niece. A man from her people is riding the king's horse. What would you want to know before you told her what that means?

The printed story numbers run from 1 to 21. The centerfold is story pp. 10–11 (PDF pp. 12–13). Read the back cover there. Keep the last picture open at the second banquet doorway.

Read Esther online

https://esther.gappjunction.com

Scan the code or use the address above. Sign in and choose Read Esther to open the digital issues.

One Night in Susa

The Jewish community in Persia | The twelfth-year crisis, about 474 BCE

Picture a journey east from Jerusalem through Babylon to Susa in today's southwestern Iran. Some Jewish families had returned to Judah and rebuilt the Temple. Esther follows those living under Persian rule away from Jerusalem. The BCE dates here follow the usual identification of Ahasuerus with Xerxes I.

Where we are in the biblical story

Date in Esther	Approx. BCE	Event and passage
Year 3	483–482	Xerxes holds his feasts and Vashti loses her place (1:3–22).
Year 7, Tebeth (month 10)	479–478	Esther is taken to the king and becomes queen (2:16–18). The assassination plot is reported in the following episode (2:21–23).
Year 12, Nisan 13	474	Scribes write the decree (3:7, 12–15). Later, on an unspecified date, Esther calls for a fast and enters the court on its third day (4:16–5:1).
Today → that night → tomorrow	c. 474	Esther invites her guests, the record is read overnight, and Mordecai receives public honor the next day (5:2–6:14). The chapters supply no exact date.
Sivan 23, month 3	c. 474	Reserved for a later issue
Adar 13–15, month 12	c. 473	Reserved for a later issue

How long did Mordecai wait?

About four years in the comic. Issue 2 places the plot days after the coronation feast. In Scripture, about four years and three months separate Esther's arrival in Tebeth of year 7 (2:16) from the crisis in Nisan of year 12 (3:7, 12). The plot and parade are both undated. Esther gives Mordecai credit immediately (2:22–23). The public honor comes later (6:1–3, 10–11).

What would a king remember?

The Greek historian Herodotus tells of Phylacos of Samos, whose service at the sea battle of Salamis in 480 BCE earned him land and a place among Xerxes' benefactors. In Esther 6:3, listen for the question the king asks after hearing Mordecai's name. What difference can there be between recording a deed and thanking the person who did it?

Archaeologists at Persepolis found Persian administrative tablets that track food, travel, and labor. They show how much detail officials recorded. Esther itself is our source for the court reading in Susa.

The longer view

Assyria took Samaria (c. 722 BCE). Babylon destroyed Jerusalem (587/586). Cyrus took Babylon (539), and return to Judah began. The Second Temple was completed in 516/515. Xerxes ruled 486–465. Esther's setting comes before Nehemiah's Jerusalem mission (c. 445). Alexander conquered Persia in 334–330, and Rome took Jerusalem in 63 BCE.

Greece and Persia around Esther's time. Athens and Plataea defeated the Persian landing force at Marathon in Attica (490 BCE). Xerxes took the pass at Thermopylae in central Greece (480). Greek ships won at Salamis near Athens later that year. The Greek alliance defeated the Persian army at Plataea in Boeotia (479).

Susa • UNESCO • Persepolis tablets • UChicago • Herodotus • Histories 8.85 • Greco-Persian Wars

People to Follow in Issue 5

Pick someone whose eyes you can borrow for a page. Blue labels mark people named in Scripture. Rust labels mark people created for the comic. Even a person named in Scripture can speak lines written for the comic.



Esther

Biblical

The Jewish queen touches the scepter, hosts the king and Haman, and invites both to return tomorrow (5:2–8).



Xerxes

Biblical king

Called Ahasuerus in Hebrew. Unable to sleep, he calls for the records and learns that Mordecai was never rewarded (6:1–3).



Haman

Biblical

Furious at Mordecai, he plans his death. Then he must dress Mordecai and proclaim the honor he imagined for himself (5:9–14; 6:6–11).



Mordecai

Biblical

Esther's cousin once exposed a plot against the king. After his public honor, he returns to the gate (2:21–23; 6:11–12).



Zeresh

Biblical

Haman's wife joins his friends in urging him to build the pole. After the procession, they warn him about the reversal (5:14; 6:13).



Neriah

Invented

Palace scribe and reader. His voice brings Mordecai's forgotten deed to the king. Esther 6:1–3 leaves the readers unnamed.



Ardan

Invented

An adviser in Haman's household. Through him we hear one voice among the friends and advisers described together in 5:14 and 6:13.



Mitra

Invented

A palace server who sets three places. His question about tomorrow's table lets us hear what Esther's decision means for the staff.



Aba

Invented

The royal groom steadies Mordecai's horse and shows Haman how to hold the lead. Her skill makes the public honor possible.



Harbona

Biblical figure

A royal eunuch named in 1:10. The comic casts him as the man who summons Haman. Esther 6:14 refers to the eunuchs as a group.



Sarai

Invented

Esther's friend in the second harem. When a sleepless resident says she misses her little sister, Sarai asks the sister's name.



Rina and Ada

Invented

Daughter and mother in Susa, pictured left to right. Rina asks whether the parade means they are safe. Ada knows the decree still stands.

Listen beside someone

On story p. 7, Sarai asks a woman about the little sister she misses. On p. 17, Ada answers her daughter after the procession. Pick one exchange. If you sat down beside them, what would you ask next?

Also on the page are Tirah, who stays with Esther, Navid at the gate, Samu and Besha at the pole, and Joel and Lev at the family workshop. The comic gives these workers and neighbors names. Hathach is named in Esther 4:5. His part in collecting Haman is the adaptation's choice.

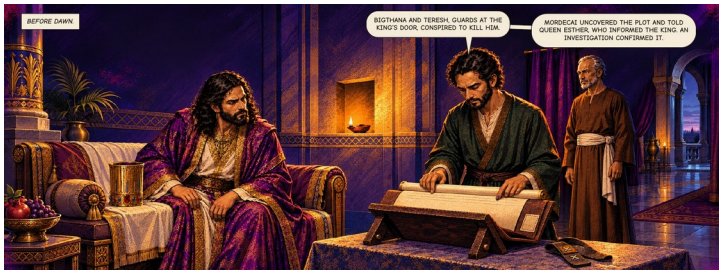
Scripture Beside the Panels

Use the printed story numbers below. Follow each panel in order. When a detail catches your eye, find the verse and ask what the artist had to decide to put that moment on paper.

Story pp.	In the biblical passage	Choices the comic makes
1–4	5:2–8 • The scepter, an invitation today, and another for tomorrow. In 5:5 the king commands that Haman be brought quickly.	Esther's fingertips fill p. 2. Xerxes says he will fetch Haman. Mitra has the table ready, and Haman offers to help. What can we tell about Esther's reason for waiting?
5–7	5:9–14 • One seated man spoils Haman's pleasure. Zeresh and the friends together propose a fifty-cubit pole.	Ardan gives one friend a name and a voice. Tirah stays with Esther, while Sarai listens to another woman missing her sister. These are imagined encounters.
8–11	6:1–5 • The king cannot sleep. The records bring up an earlier warning. Mordecai has received no honor. Haman arrives with a request of his own.	The builders, Neriah finding the record, and the light before dawn let us see different people at work in one night.
12–14	6:6–10 • Scripture tells us whom Haman thinks the king means. The king asks him to carry out his own proposal for Mordecai.	Look at Haman's face before and after the name is spoken. His expectation comes from the verse. The change in his posture comes from the artist.
15–17	6:11–12 • Haman leads the horse and announces the honor. Mordecai returns to the gate.	Aba coaches Haman on the lead. Rina sees the procession and asks Ada if they are safe. The family and their exchange belong to the comic.
18–21	6:12–14 • Haman goes home grieving, hears a warning, and is hurried to Esther's banquet.	The comic gives the advisers individual lines, adds a knock, and lets us wait with Haman at the open door. What can Haman tell from the faces at the table?

Haman names honors and riches, then says they are worth nothing while Mordecai sits at the gate (5:11–13). When has resentment of one person crowded out your gratitude? What might keep that resentment from shaping how you treat them?

Pause over the centerfold



Who has a name on their lips?

The king wants to honor someone. Haman wants permission to kill someone. What do you know about these two requests that neither man knows yet?

Centerfold detail from The Sleepless Night, Issue 5 v5.8, story pp. 10–11. © 2026 Joshua D. Gapp.

Four Letters in Esther's Invitation

Esther 5:4 • A seven-minute exercise with Dr. Bill Creasy

Read Esther 5:4 aloud. The boxes show four consecutive words of her invitation. Hebrew reads right to left, across the line and within each word. Start at box 1.

Read the invitation from right to left

← Start on the right and follow Esther's words to the left.

4 • FINISH	3	2	1 • START HERE
היום	והמן	המלך	יבוא
ha-yom today	*ve-Haman* and Haman	*ha-melekh* the king	*yavo* let … come

Which four letters do you find?

Circle the rightmost Hebrew letter in each box. Use the key to say the four initials aloud, or write them in the table below.

ה = H (he) י = Y (yod) ו = W (waw or vav)

Box 1 is row 1. Follow the rows down the page. The W in the key stands for the letter pronounced v in ve-Haman.

Box	Hebrew	Pronunciation	Meaning	English initial
1	יבוא	yavo	let … come	_____
2	המלך	ha-melekh	the king	_____
3	והמן	ve-Haman	and Haman	_____
4	היום	ha-yom	today	_____

Read your last column from top to bottom. What name do you recognize?

Compare what you found

יהוה **Y – H – W – H**

In English we write Y–H–W–H from left to right. These four consonants spell the personal name of Israel's God, often printed LORD in English Bibles. The word "today" gives the final H.

Hebrew Esther never names God directly. Dr. Creasy sees an imprint of God's presence in this invitation. Readers can see the same four letters and differ about whether the author arranged them deliberately.

Reread 5:4. With the initials in mind, what do you notice about the ordinary words Esther chooses to speak?

Esther 5 in Hebrew and English • Hopf and Bezold on the initials

What We Can Learn Tonight

What happens in the passage	What it asks of us
Esther gives Mordecai credit (2:22). Years later the king asks what honor he received (6:3).	A name can sit in a record while a person goes unthanked. When you tell the story of a success, whose part deserves to be heard?
Haman has wealth, family, and rank. One seated man makes it all seem worthless to him (5:11–13).	Resentment can change what we value and how we use power. When you feel slighted, who can help you hear the other person's side?
Mordecai receives royal honor and returns to his post (6:10–12). The decree still threatens his people.	The parade gives the crowd a reason to cheer. Rina needs to know whether she can sleep safely tonight. Listening to her question changes what care looks like.

Dr. Creasy and other scholars

Dr. Bill Creasy • Esther 5:4. Creasy finds an imprint of God's presence in the initials you circled on page 5. The invitation matters even before we notice the letters. Esther has risked her life for the chance to speak.

Rabbi Nehemiah • Esther 5:4. Why include Haman? In the Talmud, this rabbi imagines Esther wanted her people to keep praying for mercy even with a queen who could speak for them. It is one of several answers Jewish teachers gave to a question Esther leaves open.

David Firth • Esther 6:1–11. This Christian Old Testament scholar draws attention to who speaks first. The king brings up honor before Haman can ask for Mordecai's death. Firth sees that timing as an invitation to recognize God's care in the story.

Rabbi Nehemiah • Megillah 15b:14 • David Firth • Esther 6:1–11

For our conversation

- At the centerfold, choose one detail from Esther 6:1–5 and one the artist supplied. Which detail most affected how you understood that night?
- Haman invents an honor he would love to receive. What does his answer reveal that he would probably never say about himself (6:6–9)?
- Imagine Rina is your niece. After the parade (story p. 17), what can you honestly tell her, and what could you do for her family tonight?

One response this week

Who will I thank by name or stand beside this week? What will I do, and when?