

# The Sovereign: Episode 3 Discussion Guide



## Read Together

We're in a series called *The Sovereign: An 8-Episode Series on God, Esther, and the Rest of Us*. It's the story of young Jew, exiled from her homeland, wrestling with her identity as she rises from orphan nobody to Persian royalty—just in time to save her people from genocide.

- Can anyone recap the story so far in less than two minutes?
  - Episode 1: "The Refusal" (Esther 1:1-22)
  - Episode 2: "The Contest" (Esther 2:1-18)

This week, we're in Episode 3: "The Letter" (Esther 2:19-3:15). By the end of Episode 3, five years have passed since the end of Episode 2.

- **Can someone read this week's episode for us?**
- When we're finished, **can some recap (or paraphrase) the episode in your own words?** If you miss a few details or leave anything out, the rest of the group can jump in at the end.

## Discuss Together

*It's okay if you don't get through all the questions. As discussion leader, your job is to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and facilitate a conversation that leads people toward everyday life like Jesus. Feel free to add additional questions of your own. If you have a big group, it can be helpful to discuss some questions in groups of 2-3 before opening it up to the whole group.*

- **What is something that struck you from an initial reading of the text?**
- Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman (3:2-6). **What are some reasons why Mordecai might have refused to bow?**
  - In *Faith Among the Faithless*, Mike Cospers writes, "[Haman] was vested with all the king's authority, and in a world where authority was likened to divinity, the symbolism of bowing was much more than a sign of deference. It was a recognition of this divinity-authority connection, and it was an act of worship." We could say that "refusing to bow" before Haman might be equated to living according to your religious convictions even when it gets you in trouble.

- **Why might it have been simpler for Mordecai to just bow down?**
  - **What are some situations in our own cultural moment that might be similar to Mordecai's choice here? It's okay to disagree.**
- In Esther 3:8, Haman describes the Jews—without ever using their name. **What are some ways that this description sounds like it could be describing the church?**
- Haman makes this whole situation about *tolerance*. First, his staff asks him if “Mordecai’s behavior should be *tolerated*” (3:4). Then, Haman tells Xerxes, “It is no longer to the king’s profit to *tolerate* them” (3:8).
  - **How would most people define *tolerance* in our own cultural moment?**
  - Tim Keller, a pastor who spent his ministry in one of the most pluralistic cities in the US, defines Christian *tolerance* like this: “*Tolerance* is neither indifference (we may be appalled at the other person’s views) nor acceptance. It means rather treating the other person with respect even if we find her ideas difficult to endure.” **What does this definition of *tolerance* add to, affirm, or change what we just said?**
  - **What might this kind of tolerance look like in everyday life?**
  - **How can you respond if someone says it’s *intolerant* to try to convince them to believe what you believe about Jesus, death, sexuality, or anything else?**
- Tolerance slips into violent intolerance in Esther 3:9. Instead of challenging Haman’s violent intolerance, Xerxes is complicit in it.
  - **What does it mean to be *complicit* in an injustice?**
  - **What are some reasons it’s easier to just go along with injustice rather than speak up against it—especially if it doesn’t affect you?**
- Being tolerated is a privilege, not a right for believers. There might be times where believers are not tolerated. **How does the gospel enable us to endure intolerance?**
- **What other questions or thoughts do you have from this week’s episode?**

## Pray Together

Pray that the Lord would help us know how to tolerate others and when *not* to tolerate injustice—as well as the capacity to endure intolerance.