

Discussion Questions and Small Group Leader Guide

Entering the Passion of Jesus By A.J. Levine

By Jen Kidwell

This is a fantastic book to use with small groups during Lent. I love much of Professor Levine's work, but this book is especially good for groups. It's accessible and still challenging, and her research and perspective always sparks interesting conversation. We ran this as an all-church study during Lent 2019 and leaders transitioned to virtual small groups part way through. It complemented a "Holy Week in Slow-Mo" sermon series. The book gives readers the opportunity to dig into stories that happen during the time between Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and the crucifixion, but the text doesn't actually cover the trial or the crucifixion. There are plenty of wonderful stories to reflect on, and it's refreshing in that it takes a different path to prepare us for Jesus' death and resurrection.

The supplemental material from the publisher seemed expensive, and I wasn't particularly impressed by the samples, so I created prep materials and discussion questions for the leaders of our groups. This guide is meant to make this book accessible to more churches and groups, especially since using DVDs for groups can be challenging in a virtual format. Purchasing this guide once gives you a license to distribute it to the leaders of small groups reading this book *at your church*. If you decide it feels appropriate to purchase more than one copy to support the creation of more resources like this, you of course may do so.

These materials are designed to highlight material/potential pitfalls and to provide some discussion/reflection questions and/or activities. Throughout, I highlight additional scripture for reflection in light of Levine's arguments. Group leaders may find that their group wants to move in their own directions, but these notes will be helpful prep for their preparation regardless. There's a lot here, and the point isn't to memorize the interesting stuff, but to *reflect* on the stories in meaningful ways. When we ran it, we read one chapter per week, and lumped the Introduction and Chapter 1 together at the beginning of the study.

I almost always start discussions by opening up the floor for initial impressions or things that "jumped out" at folks from the text, which I recommend doing during each session. Sometimes that's enough to get conversation going, and these questions will give you a good idea of a road map for how to lead the discussion moving forward and what points you want to be sure to hit. Begin and end the sessions in prayer, using the Lord's Prayer if group leaders and members are uncomfortable with extemporaneous prayer.

7. For leaders only: consider reading Zechariah 14 in preparation since Levine builds so much of her argument at the end of the chapter on the last verse of this chapter. It's a lot to take, with divine war and some Raiders of the Lost Ark type of trippiness thrown in, but it does seem to move in the direction that the author suggests. After epic battles, the distinction between Gentile and Jew, the sacred and secular, falls away.
8. The last few pages have such wonderful sacramental theology. As Levine explains the meaning of the Zech 14:21 reference, she writes, "The sacred nature of the Temple will be spread through all the people." How does this help you think about what communion is, and the relationship between Jesus and the church as the Body of Christ?
9. Does remembering the history of the destruction of the Temple and the significance it had for practicing Jews and Christians who still observed Jewish worship impact how you interpret the references to Jesus' body as a temple? Or your understanding of our bodies as temples? Often when I hear a reference to our bodies as temples, we might think it just means to "be healthy." But the Temple was much more than a place to keep clean! It was a place where reconciliation between God and people, and between people and people happened! If our bodies are temples, than our bodies can be dedicated to this work; and they have intrinsic value as potential places where this work happens, regardless of their ability.

Chapter 3

1. What experience, if any, do you have with teaching? As our author highlights, Jesus was a teacher, and many characteristics marked his style of teaching. How would you describe the primary methods Jesus used to teach? What can we learn about interpreting scripture by how he used the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scriptures when he taught? As you have looked to Jesus as a teacher when you read the gospels, what lessons, parables, and/or sermons/exhortations have you found most compelling as you reflect?
2. In our cultural and political climate, we are all too familiar with public discourse that consists of "gotcha" questions or leading questions that try to force people into false dichotomies to alienate them from their supporters. How have you seen people handle these questions gracefully or to respond in such a way that circumvents the underlying goals of the askers?
3. [Taxation] How have you interpreted Jesus' "alternative question" in the story about how he deals with taxation? What "belongs" to God? What "belongs" to other powers/principalities? Is it a useful question? Or just a rhetorical one?