

# *Jesus Wasn't Killed by the Jews: Reflections for Christians in Lent*

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## **GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

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*How do I lead a good group discussion? Consider printing this out for your members to read aloud at your first session.*

Good group discussions take place when . . .

- Each person has a chance to speak, expressing their ideas and feelings without being interrupted.
- No one dominates the discussion. (Consider setting a time limit of one minute for each person who speaks, each time they speak.)
- The group becomes a safe place where members can say what they feel without fear of being laughed at or commented on inappropriately.
- Feedback is handled with kindness. After someone speaks, questions are appropriate, as long as they are offered in a spirit of clarifying, not correcting, and always respectfully.

## **TOPICS BY CHAPTER— WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **You Can't Understand Judaism Simply by Reading the Old Testament**

- Could someone summarize what the author says in this chapter?
- Was this new to you—the idea that Judaism today is very different from what we read about in the Old Testament?

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- How does this understanding impact the way you understand Jewish people?
- What can we do, as a group or individually, to learn more?

### **Chapter 2**

#### **“Israel Is My Firstborn Son” (Exodus 4:22)**

- Could someone read this aloud—from Exodus 4:21-23?

And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.’”

The context of this passage is the story of the Passover, when Moses led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

- What does the author say is the meaning of Israel being God’s “firstborn son”?
- How would you describe God’s relationship with Israel?
- How does God’s relationship (and covenant) with Israel relate to our relationship with Jewish people today?

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Christianity’s Complicated Origins**

- The author says that a typical rendition of Christian origins is: “Christianity fulfills the promises God made to Jews in the Old Covenant.” Has that been your experience?
- How have Christians misused the word “legalism” to understand Judaism and Jews?
- What did you learn in this chapter about the timing of the origins of the Christian church, and how its gradual establishment related to Judaism and Jews?

#### **Chapter 4**

#### **The New Testament Was Written Entirely by Jews**

- The premise of this chapter is very simple. Was it new to you?
- What can happen to Christians who don't know or appreciate the Jewishness of Jesus, and the Jewish context of the writings of the New Testament?
- Did you take away anything in particular about Paul and his letters, or Mark's Gospel, or Matthew's Gospel, or John's Gospel?

#### **Chapter 5**

#### **Supersessionism/Replacement Theology**

- Could someone please define this term for the group: supersessionism?
- Could someone try distinguishing between antisemitism and anti-Judaism?
- Let's look closely at the final two paragraphs of this chapter. What was so radical about what the church has taught since Vatican II about supersessionism/replacement theology?

#### **Chapter 6**

#### **Spiritual Practices on Ash Wednesday**

- Could someone remember for the group the story the author told about going to Mass in Brooklyn on Ash Wednesday, and what he thought about while walking home?
- How do you feel about ashes on the forehead?
- What do you think of the author's reasons for wiping the ashes off?

#### **Chapter 7**

#### **Caution about Maundy Thursday Passover Seders**

- What does the author mean when he says that Christian Passover Seders can be conducted in a way that's like stealing from Jews and Judaism?

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- Guidelines are offered for having a Seder. Can you recall some of those?
- What should be the intentions of Christians who conduct a Passover Seder on Maundy Thursday?

### **Chapter 8**

#### **For When We Hear “Crucify him!” on Good Friday**

- Could someone please describe what the Gospel reading on Good Friday is like?
- The author offers context for that reading—and wishes that every pastor in every parish would give the reading some context each Good Friday.
- Why does he suggest that?

### **Chapter 9**

#### **The Great Commandment**

- Jesus was a rabbi. What does the author say about who his preaching provoked, and why?
- How should we understand Jesus when he critiques his fellow Jews?
- Why do you think we’ve often been taught that legalism, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness are Jewish qualities?

### **Chapter 10**

#### **Why We Need to Translate *Ioudaioi* as “Judeans”**

- Why is it relevant to consider if we are translating the word for “Jews” properly?
- What does it mean to translate the Greek word, often made “Jews,” as “Judeans” instead?
- Could someone read aloud this paragraph from p. 82?

Neither Jesus in John nor John the Baptist in Luke could imagine God wanting people to abandon the covenant. The opposite is true: they were calling people back to the

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covenant. In other words, the struggle was not in any way between “Jews” and “Christians.” It was between different understandings of what it means to be the people of God.

This relates directly to what we will see in the final chapter of the book . . .

### **Chapter 11**

#### **From the “Teaching of Contempt” to *Nostra Aetate*: The Shift of Vatican II on the Relations with the Jews**

- What was the position of the Catholic Church toward Jews and Judaism before Vatican II?
- How did this change at Vatican II through *Nostra Aetate*?
- Do you feel the church has done a good job of teaching this new understanding?
- What can we do better?

### **Chapter 12**

#### **Differences among Early Jesus Followers: Paul’s Warning to the Thessalonians**

- Read together, as a group, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.
- What are the incendiary phrases in that passage?
- What does the author offer, as context, for our better understanding of Paul’s words?
- Someone read aloud the final sentence of this article. What do Jews and Gentiles both await?

### **Chapter 13**

#### **“For Fear of the Jews”: Antisemitism in John’s Time and in Ours**

- What is the author’s reason for saying: “First and foremost, ‘fear of the Jews’ is a ridiculous and inaccurate statement of why the followers of Jesus are gathered behind locked doors”?

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- This chapter takes another look at the context of anti-Jewish statements in the New Testament. See, for instance, the third full paragraph on p. 104. How were the Jesus followers and the Jews of the Temple engaged in a kind of “family fight”?
- See also his conclusions on p. 110. What does he mean by “We need to acknowledge our family resemblance”?

**Chapter 14**  
**What Do We Say to Our Children?**

- The author offers many excellent ideas in this chapter. But, as it is the final chapter in the book, take a “step back” from what Rabbi Sasso specifically suggests, and answer this question for yourself—and share your ideas with those around you . . .
- What will you say to the next generation about the Jewish people, about Judaism, and about the death of Jesus?
- How have your views changed as a result of reading this book?