

DISCIPLE

Reading Group Discussion Guide

The author's notes in the back of the book provide some interesting topics for discussion. Here are a several more thought provoking questions for your group to mull over.

1. There is no mention in the Bible about any of the twelve apostles having wives. Yet we are told that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law...although Peter could have been a widower. However, 1Corinthians 9:5 says, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" What implications would this have had on their travels with the Lord? What about their later ministries? How did they provide for themselves, a wife...and perhaps children?
2. In the book, Channah remains skeptical when told of Saul's conversion. She, of course, still carried resentments over the death of Stephen. How do you think the average Christian would have reacted to the news? Would they have been accepting of Saul if he had suddenly shown up at one of their meetings?
3. There seems to have been a tradition of nicknames in the early church. The Lord called James and John "The Sons of Thunder." He also renamed Simon "Cephas," which means "rock" or "building stone." Joseph from Cyprus was called Barnabus, meaning "Son of Encouragement." Why do you think this practice was so widespread? Was it restricted just to the Church, or was it a societal practice? Is this any different than us calling Andrew Jackson "Old Hickory" or Abraham Lincoln "Honest Abe?"
4. In the book, Shemu'el is turned away at the Temple because he is a follower of The Way of Yeshua. Given the growing animosity Caiaphas and the Temple aristocracy exhibited toward Peter and John, would they have also tried to strike out at individual followers in ways such as this?
5. Miryam, the mother of Yeshua, is portrayed as moving behind the scenes to aid and facilitate...much as she did at the wedding feast in Cana. What do you believe her position was within the early church?
6. The scene in which the apostles partition the world is based upon early traditions and the places they drew from the bowl reflects the areas where they have traditionally been said to have preached. Do you think this is how it was done? If not, how did they decide who went where?
7. The use of barley and wheat to determine the sex of an unborn child is documented in what is known as the *Berlin Papyrus*, circa 1300-1200 BC. This method was used well into the 18th Century. (A reliable urine test wasn't developed until 1929.) Curiously enough, a 1963 trial with modern grains indicated that urine from non-pregnant women inhibited germination, but when urine from pregnant women was used, modern wheat and barley failed to detect the sex of the unborn child. Why? Hybridization of seed stocks, inorganic fertilizers, use of pesticides? How reliable do you think the grains would have been? Were there alternatives?

8. In the book, when Rivkah speaks to the enslaved women she is actually paraphrasing the words of St. Augustine following the Fall of Rome. There was extensive raping and looting, and a number of pagan women committed suicide because they'd been "shamed." The Christian women generally didn't because of the belief Rivkah expresses when she says, "Never forget, purity lies in the mind, not the flesh. As women, we sometimes cannot control what happens to our bodies..." How has this concept changed over the centuries? How has it changed in the last fifty years? How does it differ by culture?
9. The ancients gave the meaning of a name more significance than we do today. They believed that by giving an individual a particular name, the attributes of that name would somehow be bestowed upon the person. For instance, in *Disciple* Zeeta tells Rivkah she named her son Orion because she dreamed of him being a great hunter. While names still have an underlying meaning, few modern parents use it as a factor on which to base their decision. Instead, our society seems to be swayed by the popularity of a certain actor/actress or a lead character in a movie or popular novel. If you have children, what influenced you to name them as you did? When we name a child after a parent or grandparent, is this to honor a forbearer, or are we hoping the child will emulate them in some way? Why did your parents name you what they did?
10. The story of Eleana in *Disciple* reflects the strong pro-life beliefs of the early church. One of the earliest documents of the church, *The Didache*, or *Teachings of the Apostles*, states "Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion." It goes on to say, "The Way of Death is filled with people who are...murderers of children and abortionists of God's creatures." All of the church Fathers soundly condemned abortion as murder. In light of this, is it possible to be both a Christian and a supporter of abortion?

Note: Many well-meaning people believe that, "Abortion should be restricted to cases of rape or incest." What seems, at first glance, to be a reasonable and compassionate stance, in reality, turns out to be no such thing. Unlike some modern Christians, the early church Fathers felt that all life belonged to God and God alone. If you would like to read a thoughtful discussion of this issue, refer to the article, [Rape and Abortion](#).