AJ Levine

**Entering the Passion**

Study Guide – WEEK 1

*Introduction*

In this study, we are going to be entering into the stories of the final week of Jesus’ earthly life.

Each of the four Gospels tells us about this week and it is perhaps the most important story Christians have to tell about who God is.

The story of that last week is often called the Passion narrative, with “passion” coming from an old Latin word meaning “to suffer” and “to endure.”

Jesus’ suffering and death reveal to us how God’s love works in the world.

The Passion narrative is not only about Jesus; it is about his followers as well, and so it is also about us.

So – we are going to try to recall together the “Events of Holy Week”.

[write up responses as people remember the stories]

Today we will be focusing on Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem,

which begins the Passion story.

We want to begin by praying that we will see something new that helps us to see the story in a new way, and to see our world differently in light of the story.

*Opening Prayer*

God

who enters into the suffering of this world,

we trust that you see and know

the pains of the world and our lives.

We share your desire for a world

that better reflects your reign,

and we ask for new eyes

to see your intentions.

As we follow Jesus into Jerusalem,

upset our expectations

and surprise us with new hope

for justice and new life.

Amen.

*Intro film*

A.-J. will talk about the primary themes of our session today:

Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the risks taken by Jesus and his followers.

Notice how A.-J. captures the drama and tension of the scene in her presentation.

If you are reading the book, you might make connections with what she writes there…

Then, we will discuss both the video and book together.

*Play the first track on the DVD, Entering the Passion of Jesus,*

*Session 1: Jerusalem: Risking Reputation (running time is approximately 8–10 minutes).*

Invite group members to recall a parade. It could be a famous parade like the ones broadcast on television or a community parade: Granny Smith, Moomba, ANZAC, Mardi Gras…

Ask the group to finish the following incomplete sentence based on their memories of this parade: “It wouldn’t be a parade if it didn’t have . . .”

*Allow some time for persons to share responses.*

*Now say to the group:*

A.-J. compares Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to a parade. However, the particular parade the people of Jesus’ day had in mind was probably a triumphal entry, which the book describes as a victory parade. The technical term for such a parade is the Greek term parousia. You may have heard this term in relation to the return of Jesus at the time of the final judgment.

In chapter 1 of the book, we hear about parades with which the people in Jerusalem would have been familiar. These include both contemporary parades of generals and kings, and ancient processions such as Solomon’s coronation parade.

* Shavuot
* Passover
* Sukkot/Booths/Tabernacles
* Hanukkah

*Ask:*

* What elements did these parades have that Jesus’ entry also has? What is different?
* How did the expectations of the people determine what they saw?

*Make sure that all the participants have access to a Bible for this exercise.*

*Say to the group:*

A.-J. emphasizes that we can’t fully understand Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem unless we know the context from the Old Testament. We’re going to conduct a little exercise that will help us see the story of Jesus’ entry as the Gospel of Matthew describes it alongside stories from the Old Testament that relate to it.

*Divide into four Give each person or pair one of the following passages or sets of passages:*

1. ​Zechariah 9:9-10

**9**Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
    Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
    triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
    on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
**10**He[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah+9%3A9-10&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23010a)] will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
    and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,
    and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
    and from the River to the ends of the earth.

1. 1 Kings 1:33-40; 2 Kings 9:12-13

**33**the king said to them, ‘Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. **34**There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, “Long live King Solomon!” **35**You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.’ **36**Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, ‘Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. **37**As the Lord has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.’

**38**So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule, and led him to Gihon. **39**There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ **40**And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise.

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**12**They said, ‘Liar! Come on, tell us!’ So he said, ‘This is just what he said to me: “Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.”’ **13**Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Kings%209%3A12-13%20&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-9770a)] steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king.’

1. Psalm 118:19-29

**19**Open to me the gates of righteousness,
    that I may enter through them
    and give thanks to the Lord.

**20**This is the gate of the Lord;
    the righteous shall enter through it.

**21**I thank you that you have answered me
    and have become my salvation.
**22**The stone that the builders rejected
    has become the chief cornerstone.
**23**This is the Lord’s doing;
    it is marvellous in our eyes.
**24**This is the day that the Lord has made;
    let us rejoice and be glad in it.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118%3A19-29+&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-15894a)]
**25**Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
    O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

**26**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118%3A19-29+&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-15896b)]
    We bless you from the house of the Lord.
**27**The Lord is God,
    and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
    up to the horns of the altar.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118%3A19-29+&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-15897c)]

**28**You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
    you are my God, I will extol you.

**29**O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
    for his steadfast love endures for ever.

1. Deuteronomy 18:18

**18**I will raise up for them a prophet[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+18%3A18+&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-5403a)] like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+18%3A18+&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-5403b)] who shall speak to them everything that I command.

*Ask each person/pair to read its assigned passage(s) and then read Matthew 21:1-11 to see how the assigned passage sheds light on some element of Matthew’s version of Jesus’ entry. Encourage the group to use the study book to find additional information about how their assigned verses relate to Matthew’s passage.*

*Tell them to prepare to comment on the story as it is read by a narrator.*

A Narrator reads Matthew 21:1-7, (pause) 8, (pause) 9, (pause) 10-11

**21**When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. **2**He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. **3**If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them.” He sent them off right away. **4**Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, **5***Say to Daughter Zion,* “*Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.*”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+21%3A1-11+&version=CEB#fen-CEB-23829a)] **6**The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. **7**They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them.

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**8**Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road.

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**9**The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, “*Hosanna* to the Son of David! *Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+21%3A1-11+&version=CEB#fen-CEB-23833b)]*Hosanna* in the highest!”

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**10**And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they asked. **11**The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

*When the narrator pauses, the group members can offer additional information to help interpret what’s going on and who the people—the disciples, the crowds—think Jesus is. For instance, after the disciples bring Jesus the donkey and colt, the first group might begin by saying, “Wow! This reminds me of a prophecy in Zechariah. There it says . . .”*

*Ask:*

* What surprised you about reading the passage this way?
* What do the Old Testament passages tell us about the expectations of who Jesus is?

**Envision Joining the Parade**

Read aloud Matthew 21:9-11

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Ask participants:

•​What two titles are given to Jesus in these verses? [Son of David, prophet] •​What do they know about his background? [from Nazareth, in Galilee] Say to the group: Both of these titles suggest how the people saw Jesus.

According to A.-J., “Son of David” recalls a time when David ruled a nation marked by security and justice, compassion and hope. In calling Jesus a prophet, the crowds were remembering figures like Moses who spoke for God.

A.-J. wonders what it would mean for us not only to welcome Jesus but also to join the parade and work for the will of God in the world. We can also reflect on what “Nazareth” and “Galilee” suggest:

* the Christmas story (to remind us that the death of Jesus cannot be separated from his birth and the rest of his life)
* ​Galilee, and so not a resident of Jerusalem, which is in Judea. Galilee, the place where the mission began and the major miracles occurred. Divide into small groups of three or four people.

*Ask the groups to read through the section of chapter 1 related to taking up the cross.*

*Ask them to consider the following questions:*

* What did “taking up the cross” mean for the people of Jesus’ time? What does it mean for us?
* Why is it important not to separate the Triumphal Entry from the cross?
* Why is it important not to separate the Passion narrative from the rest of the life of Jesus?
* What areas of pain in the world call for risk in the name of justice?

After allowing time for discussion, bring the whole group back together. Share some of the reflections from the small group discussion. Then ask the group members to close their eyes and imagine that they are part of a parade that leads them into the pain of the world and the places where justice and compassion are hard to find. Ask them to respond silently to the following questions, pausing after each one:

* Where are we headed?
* To what or whom are we moving toward?
* ​Who is moving with us?
* What forces are threatening our progress?
* What might we be called to risk in order to give witness to Christ’s cause?
* ​What gives us courage to keep moving?

Give people an opportunity to feed back…

Closing Activity

*Invite group members to consider the meaning of the word Hosanna!, which might be translated as “Save, please!”*

*Ask the following question for group discussion:*

* From what did the people who welcomed Jesus need to be saved?

Closing Prayer

Read Psalm 118.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
    his steadfast love endures for ever!

**2**Let Israel say,
    ‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’
**3**Let the house of Aaron say,
    ‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’
**4**Let those who fear the Lord say,
    ‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’

**5**Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
    the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
**6**With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
    What can mortals do to me?
**7**The Lord is on my side to help me;
    I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
**8**It is better to take refuge in the Lord
    than to put confidence in mortals.
**9**It is better to take refuge in the Lord
    than to put confidence in princes.

**10**All nations surrounded me;
    in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
**11**They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
    in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
**12**They surrounded me like bees;
    they blazed[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-15882a)] like a fire of thorns;
    in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
**13**I was pushed hard,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+118&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-15883b)] so that I was falling,
    but the Lord helped me.
**14**The Lord is my strength and my might;
    he has become my salvation.

**15**There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
‘The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
**16**    the right hand of the Lord is exalted;
    the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.’
**17**I shall not die, but I shall live,
    and recount the deeds of the Lord.
**18**The Lord has punished me severely,
    but he did not give me over to death.

**19**Open to me the gates of righteousness,
    that I may enter through them
    and give thanks to the Lord.

**20**This is the gate of the Lord;
    the righteous shall enter through it.

**21**I thank you that you have answered me
    and have become my salvation.
**22**The stone that the builders rejected
    has become the chief cornerstone.
**23**This is the Lord’s doing;
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    for his steadfast love endures for ever.

The psalm describes a promise of God that is available every day.

As an act of prayer, invite people to say aloud the word they have written down in the previous exercise followed by the group saying

* For …………
* Hosanna!

*And the group responds:* Hosanna

*Conclude with*

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Amen!

Levine, Amy-Jill.

Entering the Passion of Jesus Leader Guide (p. 19). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.