
Tablets Shattered: The End of an American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life

Joshua Leifer

A J Street Book Club Companion for Friends, Family & Community

How to use this guide

This reading companion is for anyone who wants to read the following book and turn that reading into a real conversation — with a group of friends, a J Street chapter group, or a synagogue community.

You don't need to be an expert on Israel, Jewish history, or politics. You just need to be willing to read and to talk.

A few suggestions for a good book club conversation:

Start with what stayed with you — a passage, an idea, a moment that stuck.

Make space for disagreement — the best conversations don't end in consensus.

Connect the book to your own life — not just to the news.

You don't have to finish the book to have a meaningful conversation.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Winner of the National Jewish Book Award, Leifer's debut is part memoir, part history, and part cultural diagnosis. He argues that the three pillars of 20th-century American Jewish identity — Americanism, Zionism, and liberalism — have collapsed, and that the institutions built on them are increasingly disconnected from the actual lives of younger Jews. Writing from his own millennial, progressive, and Jewishly literate vantage point, Leifer surveys the full landscape of contemporary Jewish life with fairness and depth. The title is drawn from the shattering of the tablets at Sinai: a catastrophe that ultimately made a new covenant possible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Leifer argues that the three pillars of American Jewish identity — being American, being Zionist, and being liberal — have all collapsed at once. Do you recognize that description in your own life or community? Which of the three feels most shaken to you personally?
 2. The book is named after the moment Moses shattered the tablets — a catastrophe that ultimately led to a second, arguably deeper covenant. Do you find that a hopeful metaphor or a painful one? What feels shattered in Jewish life right now — and is there anything that feels like it might be rebuilt?
 4. Leifer is honest about his complicated feelings about institutions — he critiques them but also seems to mourn them. How do you feel about the Jewish institutions in your own life? Are they serving you? Do you feel a sense of obligation to them?
-

TO GO DEEPER

Consider bringing one of these prompts to close your conversation:

- What is one thing from this book you want to remember a year from now?
 - Did anything in this book make you want to take action — in your community, your relationships, or your own life?
 - What question does this book leave you with that it doesn't answer?
-