

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

American Jezebel

by

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1. *American Jezebel* opens in a courtroom, with Anne Hutchinson and John Winthrop as legal opponents. How are Hutchinson and Winthrop alike? How are they different? How do they compare to the Reverend John Cotton?
2. Why was the conflict between grace and works so important to this group of early settlers? How does this conflict play out in our lives today?
3. What sort of husband was William Hutchinson? How did he contribute to Anne's work? Could she have accomplished what she did without him?
4. In 1638, explaining the source of her errors, Anne Hutchinson said, "Instead of looking to myself, I looked to men," implying that looking to oneself is the

proper stance. Discuss how this view foreshadows our modern concepts of individual liberty and freedom of religion and of conscience. You may find links between her statement and later works of American fiction, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

5. In one of his few recorded statements, made to the ministers of Boston after Anne's excommunication and banishment, William Hutchinson said, "My wife is a dear saint and servant of God." Was Anne Hutchinson really a saint?
6. Near the end of her civil trial, after Anne Hutchinson had cleverly parried the judges' many charges against her, she practically brought on her own conviction by preaching to the assembled men. Why did she do this?
7. Consider this quote by Amy Schrager Lang: "The problem of Anne Hutchinson is the problem of the public woman." What is a public woman, and why is she a problem?
8. A reader commented that Anne Hutchinson was not a feminist because she was just following the path of her father, a nonconformist English minister who was jailed for several years by his church. Do you agree? How would you compare Anne Hutchinson's rebellion to her father's?
9. Hutchinson's mentor, the Reverend John Cotton, used a Biblical quote—"as the lily among thorns"—to justify his practice of separating his congregation into "lilies"

and “thorns” and worshipping separately with the former group. What was the appeal to Anne Hutchinson of such a theology? Does it appeal to you?

10. Consider Anne Hutchinson’s words to the ministers who excommunicated her from Boston’s First Church of Christ in March 1638: “The Lord judges not as man judges. Better to be cast out of the church than to deny Christ.” What do you think about this statement?
11. What aspects of the Puritan worldview do you see in modern American life?