

A NEW COVENANT

A Catholic Journey Through Jeremiah

Twelve inductive sessions for young adults

Win · Build · Send

All Scripture quotations from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant.”

Jeremiah 31:31

USING THIS GUIDE

The format. Each session runs 75 to 90 minutes in the Win-Build-Send inductive format: open questions to gather the room (Win), numbered inductive questions through the text with shaded ANSWER boxes for the leader (Build), and closing questions with concrete practices (Send). Every session includes a Leader Preparation Guide, a Discussion Guide, and a Leader Reference Card listing every passage. Participants receive only the two-page Take-Home sheet, distributed AFTER each session.

The spoiler rules, which are load-bearing. This study is built on threads that plant early and resolve late, and on live discoveries where the group finds source passages themselves. Never reveal ANSWER box content before the discussion, never distribute Take-Home sheets before a session ends, never read Thread Watch boxes aloud, and never announce where a discovery is heading. The night your group discovers the name people were giving Jesus (Matthew 16:13-14) must belong to them.

Supplies for Session 1. Bring envelopes, one per participant. Session 1 closes with each participant writing a sealed guess, collected and kept by the leader, unopened, until Session 8. Bring the sealed envelopes, visibly, to Session 8: the ceremony for opening them is scripted in that session's Discussion Guide. Guard the basket with your life.

The translation. All quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE). Participants may bring any Catholic edition; the discovery questions work in every faithful translation, though a few wordplays are flagged for the leader where translations differ.

Timing. Every session carries a Time Note with pre-chosen cuts for nights that run long. The cuts are chosen so that no thread, steelman, or live discovery is ever lost; trust them rather than improvising.

The posture. Where the Church has defined, this study is unhedged; where she has not, the language is honest about it. Opposing readings are presented at full strength before they are answered, because a steel man persuaded is worth ten straw men dismissed, and because our separated brothers and sisters deserve to recognize their best arguments in our mouths.

CONTENTS

Session 1 · Before I Formed You	<i>Jeremiah 1</i>	4
Session 2 · Broken Cisterns	<i>Jeremiah 2-3</i>	15
Session 3 · The Temple Sermon	<i>Jeremiah 7, 26</i>	25
Session 4 · The Potter's House	<i>Jeremiah 18-19</i>	35
Session 5 · Fire in My Bones	<i>Jeremiah 20</i>	45
Session 6 · The Righteous Branch	<i>Jeremiah 23</i>	54
Session 7 · Letters to the Exiles	<i>Jeremiah 25, 28-29</i>	64
Session 8 · The New Covenant	<i>Jeremiah 30-31</i>	75
Session 9 · The Field at Anathoth	<i>Jeremiah 32</i>	87
Session 10 · The Scroll Burned and Rewritten	<i>Jeremiah 36</i>	97
Session 11 · The Man of Sorrows	<i>Jeremiah 37-38</i>	108
Session 12 · Hope Beyond the Ruins	<i>Jeremiah 39, 52, Lamentations 3</i>	119

Participant Take-Home sheets for all twelve sessions are provided as a separate merged booklet, two pages per session, for distribution after each gathering.

SESSION 1 • LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Before I Formed You

Jeremiah 1

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Through inductive study of Jeremiah 1, participants discover that God's call rests on His initiative, not human adequacy: He knows, consecrates, and appoints before birth. They find for themselves that Paul and John the Baptist are described in language echoing Jeremiah's prophetic call, and they identify the six verbs of Jeremiah 1:10 that set the agenda for the whole book, ending not in ruin but in hope: to build and to plant.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church reads Jeremiah 1:5 as one of Scripture's clearest windows into both the dignity of human life from conception and the nature of vocation as God's free initiative (CCC 2270; CCC 1). Grace precedes; freedom responds.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The man and the moment.** Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of the priests at Anathoth in Benjamin, ministered from roughly 627 BC (the thirteenth year of King Josiah) past the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and finally into exile in Egypt. He served under the last five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. He watched the last good king die, a reform collapse, and the city of God burn. Roughly forty years of preaching with almost no visible success.
- **A priest's son called to be a prophet.** Anathoth was a priestly town about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Keep this in your pocket: the man who will one day stand in the Temple gate and confront the priesthood comes from priestly blood himself.
- **Anathoth's history.** Solomon banished the priest Abiathar to Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26-27), ending Eli's priestly line at the royal court. Many scholars think Jeremiah descends from this sidelined line. The text of Jeremiah never says so outright, so hold it as a suggestive background, not a certainty. If true, God reached for His prophet from a family the establishment had pushed to the margins.
- **The almond wordplay.** In 1:11-12 the vision runs on a Hebrew pun: *shāqēd* (almond) sounds like *shōqēd* (watching). The almond is the first tree to blossom, waking while winter still holds the land. God's word is the watcher tree: it wakes first, and it will not fail to bloom.
- **How the book came to be.** The book itself shows us its own production: chapter 36 describes Baruch writing at Jeremiah's dictation. The ancient Greek text of Jeremiah is notably shorter and differently ordered than the Hebrew, and scholars debate the details of the book's composition. The Church has not defined those details; what she hands us is the inspired book itself. Be honest with your group about what we know and what we hold loosely.

- **The shape of chapter 1.** Superscription (1:1-3), call and objection (1:4-10), two visions: the almond branch and the boiling pot (1:11-16), commissioning and promise (1:17-19).

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Jeremiah's call deliberately echoes Moses. Moses objects, "Who am I?" and "I am not eloquent" (Exodus 3:11; 4:10); God answers, "I will be with you" and "I will be with your mouth" (Exodus 3:12; 4:12). Compare Isaiah's cleansed lips (Isaiah 6:5-8) and the boy Samuel hearing his name in the night (1 Samuel 3:1-10). Above all, hold Deuteronomy 18:18 in mind: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth." When God touches Jeremiah's mouth and says "I have put my words in your mouth" (1:9), the text is announcing: here is a prophet in the mold of Moses.

Fulfillment. Deuteronomy's promised prophet finds His full stop in Christ (Acts 3:22). John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15), sharing the same pattern of divine initiative before birth. Paul narrates his own call in language that closely echoes the prophetic call pattern of Jeremiah 1:5 and Isaiah 49:1: "he who had set me apart before I was born" (Galatians 1:15). And file this away where the group cannot see it: when Jesus asks "Who do men say that the Son of man is?", the crowds answer "Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Jeremiah is the only writing prophet they name. That is Thread 2, and it stays face down until late in the study.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome · *Prologue to his Commentary on Jeremiah*

St. Jerome, who translated and commented on Jeremiah, remarked that the prophet's style seems plainer and more rustic than Isaiah's or Hosea's, yet he is their equal in the weight of his meaning. The same God speaks through the humble style as through the lofty one. For your group: God's power is not diminished by the ordinariness of His instrument, and neither is yours.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great · *Pastoral Rule, Book I, ch. 7*

St. Gregory contrasts Isaiah, who volunteers ("Here am I! Send me"), with Jeremiah, who resists ("I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth"). He teaches that both responses can flow from love: one from zeal to serve, the other from a humility that fears the office. Neither man trusted himself; both obeyed. Reluctance, offered honestly to God, can be the raw material of a vocation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II · *Evangelium Vitae 44*

Reflecting on Jeremiah 1:5, St. John Paul II taught that the life of every human being belongs to God's loving plan from its very beginning. God's gaze rests on the child in the womb not as a

potential person but as a person already known and loved, whose life is sacred because it is enfolded from conception in the Creator's personal care.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2270** ; quotes Jeremiah 1:5 directly: human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception, for God knows and consecrates before birth.
- **CCC 1** ; God, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to share His own blessed life, and at every time and place He calls man to seek Him and to know Him.
- **CCC 2001** ; the preparation of man for grace is already a work of grace; God's free initiative always comes first. Background for the steelman chain; keep it in the leader guide.
- **CCC 600** ; to God all moments of time are present; His eternal plan of predestination includes each person's free response to His grace. Background for the steelman chain; keep it in the leader guide.
- **CCC 64** ; LEADER ONLY. Do not read this paragraph aloud or reference it tonight. It names the destination of Thread 1, and the group must arrive there on their own.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY • NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1; Build and Plant (MASTER THREAD). Six verbs in 1:10: pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow, and then: build, plant. Four verbs of demolition, two of hope, and hope gets the last word. These exact verbs return at the hinge of the book, immediately before its greatest promise. Tonight participants seal a written guess (Take-Home 1); the seals are opened in Session 8. Never hint at Jeremiah 31 or the words "new covenant." If someone already knows the famous passage, quietly ask them to sit on it.

Thread 2; The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Known before birth. Sent to his own. Opposed by his own. Promised "they shall not prevail." Track every point of contact with Christ as the study proceeds, and say nothing. The thread resolves in Session 11, when the group reads Matthew 16:14 for themselves.

Thread 3; The Watched Word. "I have put my words in your mouth" (1:9); "I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12). The indestructibility of God's word returns at the Temple sermon (Session 3) and above all at the burned and rewritten scroll (Session 10).

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell the setting: who Jeremiah is, when he ministered, and what is about to happen to Judah.
2. Participants discover from the text that God's knowing, consecrating, and appointing all precede Jeremiah's birth (1:5), and they find the echoes in Galatians 1:15 and Luke 1:15 themselves.

3. Participants hear the Reformed reading of Jeremiah 1:5 at full strength and can articulate the Catholic response: grace is first, but first is not instead.
4. Participants identify the six verbs of 1:10, notice their order, and seal a written guess about where the book is going.
5. Participants leave with one concrete practice of answering God's call this week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer, memory verse, and sealing the guess: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: cut Question 9 (the Anathoth background) first, and compress the second vision (1:13-16) into a one-sentence leader summary: the boiling pot from the north foreshadows the invader, commonly understood as Babylon, and it is coming. Never cut the steelman chain, and never skip the sealing of the guess. The guess is the engine of the whole study.

Before I Formed You

Jeremiah 1

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, slowly:

"Father, before we were formed, You knew us. Before we chose You, You chose us. As we open the book of Jeremiah tonight, give us ears to hear a word that is older than we are and more faithful than we will ever be. Speak, Lord. Your servants are listening. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Tell us about a time someone saw something in you: a talent, a role, a future, before you could see it in yourself. What did that feel like?

W2. In your experience, what is the difference between being qualified for something and being called to it?

Leader note: *do not resolve W2. Let the distinction hang in the air; the whole session answers it.*

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 1:1-3 ALOUD.

1. Before God says a single word, what does the text want us to know? List every concrete detail: who, whose son, what town, which kings. Why might a book of prophecy begin with a datebook instead of a doctrine?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jeremiah is the son of Hilkiah, of the priests at Anathoth in Benjamin; the word of the LORD comes in the thirteenth year of Josiah and continues through Jehoiakim and Zedekiah until the captivity of Jerusalem (1:1-3).

The book anchors revelation in history. God speaks into real years, real politics, a real small town. Biblical faith is not a philosophy floating above time; it is God acting in datable events. This is why the Creed can say "suffered under Pontius Pilate" in the same breath as "rose again": our faith has a date and an address.

READ JEREMIAH 1:4-5 ALOUD, TWICE.

2. Find the three verbs God applies to Jeremiah before his birth. What is the sequence, and what has Jeremiah contributed at each step?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Knew, consecrated, appointed (1:5). And Jeremiah has contributed exactly nothing; he does not yet exist. In a call context like this one, God's "knowing" signifies far more than bare foreknowledge; it is fittingly read as personal, covenantal regard. The call does not begin with Jeremiah's talent, his résumé, or even his consent. It begins in the mind of God.

3. "Consecrated" is temple language. What kinds of things get consecrated? So what is God saying when He consecrates a person, in the womb?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

You consecrate altars, vessels, priests: things set apart for God's exclusive use. God is declaring that a human life can be set apart the way sacred space is: claimed for His purposes before anyone else can lay claim to it. There is no moment of Jeremiah's life that lies outside God's loving claim and providential care.

DIG DEEPER · THE CHURCH AT THE WOMB

The Catechism quotes this very verse when it teaches that human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception (CCC 2270). The Church's defense of unborn life is not a modern political posture bolted onto the faith; it grows straight out of texts like Jeremiah 1:5 and out of a God who knows persons before the world can measure them.

4. Live discovery. Someone in the New Testament describes his own calling in almost exactly these words. It is in Galatians 1. Take two minutes and find it.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Galatians 1:15-16: "he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Paul reads his own life through Jeremiah 1:5. The persecutor on the Damascus road discovers that the story did not start on the Damascus road; God had been writing it since before he was born.

5. Live discovery. One more. An angel says something like this about a baby not yet born, in Luke 1. Find it.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke 1:13-17: John the Baptist "will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." The last and greatest of the prophets stands in the same pattern of divine initiative: filled with the Holy

Spirit from the womb, before merit, before choice. Notice what your group has just done: they found the pattern themselves, running from Jeremiah through Paul to John. God's calls have a signature.

Steelman: Does Jeremiah 1:5 Teach Calvinist Election?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL REFORMED FRIEND WOULD

The case: "Jeremiah 1:5 and Galatians 1:15 say exactly what Reformed theology says: God chooses unconditionally, before birth, before any merit, before any response. Jeremiah objects, and God does not negotiate; He overrides. 'To all to whom I send you you shall go' (1:7). This is sovereign, effective grace. The Catholic insistence on free cooperation quietly smuggles human merit back into what Scripture presents as God's work alone. Doesn't this text prove unconditional election?" Let the case land. Do not rush to rescue anyone.

6. Now press on the text. Look closely at 1:5; what exactly is Jeremiah appointed to? Is anything at all said here about his salvation?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He is appointed "a prophet to the nations." That is an office, a mission. The verse is election to service, not a decree about his eternal destiny. Check Galatians 1:15 again: Paul is set apart "in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Same shape: chosen for mission. Scripture certainly teaches God's initiative; whether these texts teach an unconditional decree of individual salvation is precisely what they do not say.

7. Does Jeremiah's will disappear? Read 1:6-8 again. Does God coerce him, or command and accompany him?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jeremiah objects freely (1:6), and God answers not by erasing him but by promising presence: "Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you" (1:8). Later in this book Jeremiah will argue with God, lament, even accuse Him, and remain His prophet. The relationship is real on both sides.

Where we agree with our Reformed friend, say it out loud: grace comes first. The Church has taught since the Second Council of Orange that even the beginning of faith is God's gift; the preparation of man for grace is already grace (CCC 2001). But God's eternal plan "includes in it each person's free response to his grace" (cf. CCC 600). Grace is first. First, not instead. God's call precedes our freedom in order to awaken it, not to replace it.

READ JEREMIAH 1:9-10 ALOUD.

8. Count the verbs in verse 10 and sort them into two piles. What is the ratio? What is the order? And what does the order tell you about where this book is headed?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Six verbs: pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow, and then: build, plant. Four verbs of demolition, two of construction; demolition first, hope last. This is the table of contents for the entire book. Jeremiah's message will be overwhelmingly hard, but the last word of his call is not ruin. It is planting. Do not resolve this further tonight; the sealed guess (below) depends on it.

9. (*Cut first if short on time.*) Background: Solomon banished the priest Abiathar to Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26-27), and many scholars think Jeremiah comes from that sidelined priestly line. The text does not say so outright, but if it is true, what would it tell you about the kind of instrument God reaches for?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Hold it loosely, since Scripture does not state it. Still, the resonance is suggestive: a priest's son from a family exiled from power three centuries earlier, called to confront the establishment that exiled them. God delights to call from the margins: David the youngest of eight, a circle of Galilean fishermen for apostles. Being overlooked by men has never once disqualified anyone with God.

READ JEREMIAH 1:11-12 ALOUD.

10. The almond vision runs on a Hebrew pun: *shāqēd* (almond) sounds like *shōqēd* (watching). The almond is the first tree to blossom; it wakes while winter still holds the land. What is God claiming about His word?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12). God's word is the almond branch: it wakes first, blooms before the evidence, and will not fail. Everything God speaks in this book, every warning and every promise, is under His personal watch. Nothing He says will fall to the ground. Keep your eye on this claim; the book is going to test it severely.

READ JEREMIAH 1:13-19 ALOUD. (IF SHORT ON TIME, SUMMARIZE 13-16 IN ONE SENTENCE: THE BOILING POT FROM THE NORTH FORESHADOWS THE INVADER, COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD AS BABYLON, AND IT IS COMING.)

11. Verses 17-19 are God's personal promise to Jeremiah. What exactly does God promise him; and, just as important, what does He not promise?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God promises to make him a fortified city, an iron pillar, bronze walls; "they will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you" (1:18-19). Notice what is missing: no promise of escape from the fight, no promise of success in his lifetime, no

promise of comfort. The promise is presence and final deliverance, not exemption. Sit in that for a moment. It is the shape of every real vocation.

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Where in your life right now do you suspect God knew and appointed something before you were ready to see it?

S2. Jeremiah said, “I am only a youth.” What is your version of that sentence, and what would change this week if God’s answer to you is the same one He gave Jeremiah: “I am with you”?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Jeremiah 1:5 back to God once each day, placing your own name inside it: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” Let it be the first thing you say to Him in the morning.
- Name one responsibility you have been dodging with your own version of “I am only a youth.” Take one concrete step toward it before we meet again.
- If you do not know the date of your Baptism, find it this week. That was your consecration day. Write it somewhere you will see it.

SEALING THE GUESS

LEADER INSTRUCTIONS: DO THIS BEFORE ANYONE LEAVES

Hand each participant Take-Home Sheet 1 at the door. Point them to the box marked My Guess. Have them write their answer tonight, before leaving if possible: fold the sheet’s guess panel, seal or staple it, put their name on the outside, and return it to you. You will keep the sealed guesses and open them together later in the study. Do not explain why. The mystery is the point.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord, You knew Jeremiah before You formed him, and You knew each of us. You consecrated him before his birth, and You consecrated us in the waters of Baptism. Give us the honesty to say “I am only a youth,” and the faith to hear You answer, “I am with you.” We place this week in Your hands. Watch over Your word in us, and perform it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”
(Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 1

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 1:1-3; superscription: the man, the town, the kings (Q1)
- Jeremiah 1:4-5; knew, consecrated, appointed before birth (Q2-Q3, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 1:6-8; “I am only a youth”; “I am with you” (steelman Q7)
- Jeremiah 1:9-10; words in the mouth; the six verbs (Q8, sealed guess)
- Jeremiah 1:11-12; the almond branch; the watched word (Q10)
- Jeremiah 1:13-16; the boiling pot from the north (Q11, compressible)
- Jeremiah 1:17-19; fortified city; “they shall not prevail” (Q11)

Old Testament Roots

- Exodus 3:11-12; 4:10-12; Moses’ objections and God’s “I will be with you”
- Deuteronomy 18:18; the prophet like Moses; “my words in his mouth”
- 1 Samuel 3:1-10; the boy Samuel (optional comparison)
- Isaiah 6:5-8; cleansed lips; “Here am I! Send me”
- 1 Kings 2:26-27; Abiathar banished to Anathoth (Q9, cuttable)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Galatians 1:15-16; live discovery, Q4
- Luke 1:13-17; live discovery, Q5
- Acts 3:22; the prophet like Moses is Christ (leader background)
- Matthew 16:13-14; LEADER ONLY: Thread 2; do not reveal

Catechism

- CCC 2270; life from conception (quotes Jeremiah 1:5)
- CCC 1; God freely creates and calls every person
- CCC 2001; preparation for grace is already grace (steelman, leader only)
- CCC 600; God’s plan includes each free response (steelman, leader only)
- CCC 64; LEADER ONLY until Session 8

Broken Cisterns

Jeremiah 2-3

90 minutes · Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that God frames Israel's sin not as rule-breaking but as a broken marriage: He is the Bridegroom, the fountain of living waters, and His people have traded Him for cisterns they dug themselves, cracked and dry. They find for themselves that Jesus takes up the living water image in His own voice, and they hear the astonishing refrain of chapter 3: the betrayed Husband begs His bride to come home.

Catholic Touchstone. The desire for God is written on the human heart (CCC 27), and every idol is a failed attempt to satisfy it. The wonder of prayer is revealed beside a well, where Christ offers living water to a woman who had had five husbands and whose present life, He gently reveals, was not marriage (CCC 2560).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The courtroom that is really a marriage.** Chapter 2 has the form of a covenant lawsuit: God states His case against His people. But the language is bridal from the first lines: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness" (2:2). The charge is not merely disobedience. It is adultery. Idolatry in the prophets is unfaithfulness to a marriage, which is why it wounds God and not just His law.
- **The two evils.** Jeremiah 2:13 is the thesis of the whole section, and one of the great diagnostic verses of Scripture: forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out broken cisterns. In the ancient Near East, a cistern was a pit cut into rock to catch runoff: stagnant at best, and useless if cracked. The sin has two movements: walking away from the spring, and then working hard, chisel in hand, on a substitute that cannot hold water.
- **The geography of thirst.** Verse 18 names the two superpowers, Egypt and Assyria, by their rivers: the Nile and the Euphrates. Political alliances are just cisterns at national scale. Judah keeps running to the great rivers of the age while the fountain stands at home.
- **The divorce law behind chapter 3.** Jeremiah 3:1 alludes to Deuteronomy 24:1-4: a divorced and remarried woman could not return to her first husband. By the analogy's own logic, Israel's case looks closed. Then comes the shocking prophetic reversal: "Return, faithless Israel... for I am merciful" (3:12). God is not breaking His own law; Deuteronomy 24 legislates a human marriage case, and God sovereignly summons His unfaithful people beyond what the analogy could promise. Mercy exceeds the legal frame it borrowed. Do not soften how shocking this is; the whole chapter turns on it.

- **Shuv, the key verb.** The Hebrew verb *shuv* (turn, return) rings through chapter 3 in both directions: Israel has turned away, and God calls her to turn back. “Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness” (3:22). Repentance in the prophets is not self-improvement. It is coming home to a Person.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The covenant goes back to Sinai, ratified by spoken assent and blood (Exodus 24); Scripture and Catholic tradition have long read that bond in marital terms, a reading the prophets make explicit. Hosea, a generation or two before Jeremiah, lived the same message in the north: a prophet commanded to love an unfaithful wife, because that is what God does (Hosea 1-3). The water imagery runs back further still, to Eden’s river and the rock struck in the wilderness (Genesis 2:10; Exodus 17:6).

Fulfillment. Jesus claims the fountain image in His own voice, twice, and your group will find both places themselves: at Jacob’s well He offers a woman who had had five husbands “living water” (John 4:10), and at the feast He cries out, “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). John adds that He spoke of the Spirit. The Bridegroom theme resolves in Christ as well: John the Baptist calls Him the bridegroom (John 3:29), and the Bible ends with a wedding (Revelation 21:2). Keep the bridal thread warm; it matters later in the study.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Confessions, Book I*

St. Augustine opens his *Confessions* with the sentence that explains every broken cistern ever dug: You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You. Augustine had tried the cisterns himself, ambition, pleasure, philosophy, and found each one cracked. The restlessness is not a design flaw. It is a homing signal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux · *Sermons on the Song of Songs*

Across his sermons on the Song of Songs, St. Bernard returned again and again to one name for the soul’s relation to God: bride. God wills a union of love that marriage signifies. When Jeremiah frames sin as adultery, he is testifying to how high the original invitation was.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa of Avila · *The Book of Her Life*

St. Teresa, a Doctor of the Church, described the soul in prayer as a garden watered in four ways, from the hard labor of the bucket to the sheer gift of rain (Life, ch. 11). The fountain of living waters is not a metaphor to admire from a distance. It is an invitation to drink daily, which is what prayer is.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 27** · the desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.
- **CCC 2560** · the wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there Christ comes to meet every human being, thirsting first for us so that we may thirst for Him.
- **CCC 1428** · Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of the baptized; conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church.
- **CCC 2129-2132** · the theology of sacred images: what the commandment forbids, what the Incarnation changes, and why honor given to an image passes to the one it represents. Background for the steelman chain; keep it in the leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Tonight the group learns what is broken: not a contract but a marriage. File this away: whatever God eventually builds and plants will have to heal a broken covenant, not just patch behavior. Say nothing. If anyone speculates near the target, smile and move on.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Notice tonight how Jeremiah voices God's own grief. The prophet does not merely deliver the message; he begins to feel what God feels. A bridegroom betrayed, pleading for the bride: hold the image until it finds its face.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Light touch tonight. The word spoken over the bride in her youth (2:2) has not lapsed; God remembers even when Israel forgets.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can state the two evils of 2:13 in their own words and explain why the image is so precise.
2. Participants discover that Scripture frames idolatry as adultery, and can say why that framing changes what repentance means.
3. Participants find John 4 and John 7 themselves and articulate the claim Jesus is making by taking up the fountain image.
4. Participants hear the iconoclast objection at full strength and can give the Catholic response with the bronze serpent in hand.
5. Participants name one personal cistern and one concrete way to return to the fountain this week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: cut Question 4 (the rivers of Egypt and Assyria) first, then compress Question 9 (Deuteronomy 24 background) into a one-sentence leader summary. Never cut the steelman chain or the two live discoveries in John; they are the heart of the session.

Broken Cisterns

Jeremiah 2-3

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You are the fountain of living waters, and we confess that we have dug our own wells and wondered why we are still thirsty. Tonight, show us our cisterns honestly, and show us Your heart more honestly still. Give us the courage to hear the word Return, and the grace to obey it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Think of something you were sure would satisfy you, a purchase, an achievement, a relationship, a milestone, and it did not. How long did the satisfaction last?

W2. Why do you think human beings keep going back to things that have already failed to satisfy them?

Leader note: *do not resolve W2. Jeremiah 2:13 will answer it in about twenty minutes, and the answer should land as a discovery.*

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 2:1-8 ALOUD.

1. Before God brings a single charge, what does He remember in verse 2? What kind of relationship is this language describing: a king and subjects, a judge and defendants, or something else?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness" (2:2). This is marriage language: honeymoon language, in fact. The covenant at Sinai was not a business contract; it was wedding vows. That reframes everything that follows: the coming accusations are not a policy dispute. They are the grief of a betrayed Husband.

2. In verses 5-8, God asks a wounded question: "What wrong did your fathers find in me?" Notice who never asked "Where is the LORD?" in verses 6-8. Who should have asked it, and what does their silence tell you?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The priests, those who handle the law, the rulers, and the prophets (2:8): the religious professionals.

The people best positioned to notice God's absence stopped asking for Him. Familiarity with holy things is no protection against forgetting the Holy One; sometimes it is the anesthetic. A sobering word for everyone in ministry, including the people leading this study.

READ JEREMIAH 2:9-13 ALOUD, SLOWLY. VERSE 13 IS THE THESIS OF THE ENTIRE SESSION.

3. God names exactly two evils in verse 13. State both in your own words. Why is the image of a cistern so precise? What is the difference between a fountain and a cistern, even a good cistern?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Evil one: forsaking the fountain of living waters. Evil two: hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water. A fountain is alive: it flows, renews itself, gives without running dry. A cistern is a hole in a rock that catches runoff: stagnant at best, and this one is cracked. Notice the labor involved: hewing rock is brutal work. Sin is not usually laziness; it is hard work invested in a substitute for God. That is why W2 has no natural answer. We keep returning to failed cisterns because the thirst itself is real and God-sized.

DIG DEEPER · THE RESTLESS HEART

The Catechism teaches that the desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God (CCC 27). St. Augustine said it in one line: You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You. Every idol ever worshiped is evidence of that verse. Nobody digs a cistern unless they are genuinely thirsty.

4. *(Cut first if short on time.)* Look at verse 18. Egypt and Assyria are named by their rivers, the Nile and the Euphrates. What do national alliances have to do with broken cisterns?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Judah keeps running to the superpowers for security instead of trusting her covenant God: cisterns at national scale. The great rivers of the age look far more impressive than an invisible fountain. Ask the group: what are the Nile and Euphrates of our own moment, the big impressive things we trust to keep us safe instead of God?

5. Read 2:27. The people say to a tree, "You are my father," and to a stone, "You gave me birth." But look at the end of the verse: what do they say when trouble comes, and what does that reveal?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!'" (2:27). They know. Under pressure, the pretense collapses and they cry out to the real God. Idols are fair-weather gods; nobody prays to

their stock portfolio in the emergency room. What people reach for in their worst moment tells the truth about what they actually believe.

Steelman: Does Jeremiah Condemn Catholic Images?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL PROTESTANT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Jeremiah mocks people bowing to wood and stone (2:27), and the commandment forbids making images for worship (Exodus 20:4-5). Yes, God commanded cherubim for the tabernacle and the bronze serpent, but those were His explicit exceptions for His own sanctuary, and when Israel began directing devotion to the serpent, faithful Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kings 18:4). That is the principle: worship is regulated by God’s command, not our creativity, and acts directed toward images, kneeling, kissing, candles, are exactly what the commandment guards against. Yet walk into any Catholic church and there they are: statues, candles in front of them, people kneeling. Isn’t this exactly what the prophets condemned?” Let it land. Many Catholics have never heard a real answer.

6. First press: our friend concedes God commanded the cherubim and the serpent, but calls them sanctuary-only exceptions and says devotional acts toward images are what the commandment forbids. Test that. Where did the commanded cherubim stand, and what act, exactly, did God command the people to perform toward the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:8-9)?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The cherubim stood at the dead center of Israel’s worship, over the mercy seat where God met His people (Exodus 25:18-22): not at the sanctuary’s margins but at its heart. And the serpent was commanded precisely so that the people would perform a devotional act toward it: look at it, in faith, and be healed (Numbers 21:8-9). God Himself instituted an image as the channel of a grace-filled act, and Solomon’s Temple later multiplied images beyond any explicit command, cherubim, oxen, lions, palms (1 Kings 6-7), and God consecrated it with His glory. So the commandment cannot forbid images or acts directed through them as such; what it forbids is treating the image as a god, which is exactly what 2:27 describes: calling a tree Father.

7. Second press: our friend’s best evidence is Hezekiah smashing the serpent (2 Kings 18:4). Look closely at that verse: what exactly had Israel started doing, what did Hezekiah destroy, and what did the same king leave standing in his own Temple?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Israel had begun burning incense to the serpent itself, treating the channel as the terminus, so Hezekiah destroyed it, while the commanded cherubim went on standing in that same king’s Temple (2 Kings 18:4). His own act draws the very distinction our friend’s case blurs: the target was the idolatrous act, not images as such. Give the honest concession our Protestant friend deserves:

yes, images can be abused, and when they are, faithful people remove them; the Church's own history includes such purifications. But the standing distinction is the Catholic one: veneration, honor that passes through the image to the one it represents, is not adoration, which belongs to God alone (CCC 2129-2132). A Catholic kneeling before a crucifix is not praying to plaster, any more than a soldier kissing a photo of his wife loves paper. And the Incarnation raised the stakes: the invisible God now has a face that can be depicted, because He took one (CCC 2131).

READ JEREMIAH 3:1 AND 3:12 ALOUD.

8. Verse 1 invokes Israel's divorce law: a wife who has left and remarried cannot return to her first husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). By that analogy, Israel's case looks closed. Now read 3:12 again. What does God do with the legal analogy He Himself invoked?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He reverses its verdict: "Return, faithless Israel... I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful" (3:12). The human law said no return; the divine Husband says come home anyway. God is not breaking His own law; He invoked the analogy precisely to show that His covenant mercy exceeds what any legal frame could promise. If anyone in the room believes their own case is closed, that they have gone too far to come back while breath remains, this verse was written over their head.

9. Live discovery. Jesus once sat down by a well and offered someone the very thing Jeremiah 2:13 says Israel abandoned. It is in John 4. Find the verse where He names it.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

John 4:10: "If you knew the gift of God... you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." And notice who He says it to: a Samaritan woman who had had five husbands, and whose present life, He gently reveals, was not marriage: a life that had drawn from many wells and stayed thirsty. Jesus steps into Jeremiah 2 and speaks as the fountain in person. The Catechism marvels at this scene: Christ comes to the well thirsting for us, so that we may thirst for Him (CCC 2560).

10. Live discovery. He says it again, standing up and shouting, at a feast in John 7. Find it.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

John 7:37-39: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink." John adds that He said this about the Spirit. On the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, when, as Jewish sources describe, water from the pool of Siloam was ceremonially poured out, Jesus stands and claims the fountain of Jeremiah 2:13 as Himself. The two evils have one remedy, and He is standing in the Temple court announcing it.

READ JEREMIAH 3:19-22 ALOUD.

11. Listen to the ache in verses 19-20, and then the promise in verse 22: "Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness." What does God promise to do that the returning sinner cannot do for himself?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Heal the faithlessness itself. Not merely forgive the past, but repair the broken loving mechanism inside. We cannot fix our own cracked cistern of a heart; the same God who calls us back is the one who does the healing once we come. Even our turning is grace-led: God's call awakens and enables the repentance we freely make, and the restoration is entirely His work. Hold on to that promise; this book has much more to say about what God intends to do inside the human heart.

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Name one cistern in your life right now: something you keep returning to for what only God can give. What does the thirst underneath it actually want?

S2. God's word to the bride whose case looked legally closed was "Return." Is there any part of your life where you have quietly decided you are beyond that invitation?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Once a day, when you feel a want, pause and ask one question before you reach for anything: what is this thirst actually for? Answer honestly, then say one sentence to the Fountain.
- Choose one cistern this week and fast from it for a single day. Notice what rises up in its absence, and bring that to prayer.
- If you have been away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation, hear 3:22 as addressed to you and take one step: find your parish confession times and put one on your calendar.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, Fountain of living water, we have dug our cisterns and drunk from them, and we are still thirsty. We come back to the spring. Heal our faithlessness, as You promised. Teach us to drink from You daily, until the day our thirst is finally satisfied at Your wedding feast. Amen."

(Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jeremiah 2:13, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 2-3

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 2:1-8 · the bride in the wilderness; the leaders who stopped asking (Q1-Q2)
- Jeremiah 2:9-13 · the two evils; fountain and cisterns (Q3, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 2:18 · the Nile and the Euphrates (Q4, cuttable)
- Jeremiah 2:27 · wood and stone; the emergency prayer (Q5, steelman lead-in)
- Jeremiah 3:1 · the divorce law invoked (Q8)
- Jeremiah 3:12 · “Return, faithless Israel... for I am merciful” (Q8)
- Jeremiah 3:19-22 · “I will heal your faithlessness” (Q11)

Old Testament Roots

- Exodus 24 · covenant as vow at Sinai (leader background)
- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 · the divorce law behind 3:1 (Q8, compressible)
- Hosea 1-3 · the prophet who married the message (leader background)
- Exodus 25:18-20 · cherubim commanded (steelman Q6)
- Numbers 21:8-9 · the bronze serpent commanded (steelman Q6)
- 2 Kings 18:4 · Hezekiah destroys the abused serpent (steelman Q7, live find)

New Testament Fulfillment

- John 4:7-15 · living water at the well (live discovery, Q9)
- John 7:37-39 · the cry at the feast (live discovery, Q10)
- John 3:29; Revelation 21:2 · Christ the Bridegroom (leader background)

Catechism

- CCC 27 · the desire for God written in the heart
- CCC 2560 · prayer revealed beside the well
- CCC 1428 · ongoing conversion of the baptized
- CCC 2129-2132 · sacred images (steelman, leader only)

The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7 and 26

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that God's people can turn even His true Temple into a false security: a magic charm that lets them live unjustly and feel safe. They find for themselves that Jesus quoted this very sermon, in this very place, in the last week of His life. And they learn the difference between trusting God and presuming on Him: worship that does not reach the widow, the orphan, and the stranger is worship God refuses.

Catholic Touchstone. Outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must be the expression of an interior sacrifice (CCC 2100), and Christ's call to conversion aims first at the heart, not at outward works (CCC 1430). The sacraments are real encounters with God, which is exactly why they can never be treated as amulets.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The setting is the point.** God sends Jeremiah to stand “in the gate of the LORD’s house” (7:2): the church door, at rush hour, during what chapter 26 suggests was a major public occasion. He is not sniping at religion from outside. He is a priest’s son confronting the Temple from its own threshold, in God’s name.
- **The triple mantra.** “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” (7:4). The threefold repetition is how a slogan sounds: words worn smooth by superstitious use. The people had turned a true fact (God dwells here) into a false conclusion (therefore nothing can happen to us, no matter how we live).
- **The Shiloh precedent.** God tells them to go look at Shiloh (7:12), where the tabernacle and the ark dwelt for generations until the disaster of 1 Samuel 4: the ark captured, the priests dead, the sanctuary abandoned. God has already demonstrated once that He will not be held hostage by His own address. Holy real estate never overrides a broken covenant.
- **The queen of heaven.** In 7:18 whole families conduct pagan liturgy at home: children gathering wood, fathers kindling fire, women baking cakes “for the queen of heaven.” This is a pagan goddess, most likely the Mesopotamian Ishtar or Canaanite Astarte, though scholars debate the exact identification. Idolatry had become a family devotion. This verse fuels a common objection to Catholic Marian devotion; the steelman chain takes it head-on.
- **The hard verse: 7:22.** God says He did not command sacrifices when He brought Israel out of Egypt, but “Obey my voice” (7:22-23). Read woodenly, this contradicts Leviticus. Read as prophetic idiom, it is a Hebrew way of stating priority: not sacrifice instead of obedience, but obedience as the soul of sacrifice (compare Hosea 6:6, which Jesus quotes twice). Handle it honestly; the anti-liturgical misreading is addressed in the Dig Deeper box.

- **Chapter 26: the sequel.** Chapter 26 appears to recount this Temple message, or a closely related Temple sermon, from the outside, with the reaction: “You shall die!” (26:8). Jeremiah is saved when elders cite precedent: the prophet Micah said the same thing a century earlier (26:18, quoting Micah 3:12) and King Hezekiah repented instead of killing him. Preaching this sermon nearly cost Jeremiah his life. Remember that when your group meets a later preacher who quotes it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The demand that worship and justice travel together is the united voice of the prophets: Amos thundering that God despises feasts without justice (Amos 5:21-24), Isaiah calling new moons and sabbaths an abomination when hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1:11-17), Micah’s summary of the whole law: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly (Micah 6:8). Jeremiah’s list in 7:5-6, the alien, the fatherless, the widow, is straight from the Torah’s own heart (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

Fulfillment. Six centuries later, a Galilean rabbi walks into the Temple courts then standing on the same sacred site, in the week before Passover, overturns the tables, and quotes two prophets in one sentence: Isaiah’s “house of prayer” and Jeremiah’s “den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13). Your group will find this themselves; do not spoil it. And where Jeremiah pointed to Shiloh as the fallen sanctuary, Jesus will point to His own body as the true Temple (John 2:19-21): the dwelling of God that can be destroyed and, unlike Shiloh, raised.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily 50*

St. John Chrysostom asked his congregation what use it is to load Christ’s table with golden cups while Christ Himself, in the poor at the church door, goes hungry. He was not against beautiful churches; he was against beautiful churches built by people who ignore the beautiful ones God made. First fill the hungry brother, he said, then adorn the altar. Jeremiah 7 in one sentence.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas · *Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 81*

St. Thomas classifies religion, the virtue by which we offer God worship, as a part of justice: rendering to God what is owed Him. That single move explains Jeremiah 7: religion is a distinct virtue, but it lives in justice’s household, rendering what is owed. Authentic worship of God cannot be severed from the moral debts we owe our neighbor. A person cannot be truly just toward God at the altar while being unjust toward God’s image in the street.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa of Calcutta · *Her letters and instructions to the Missionaries of Charity*

St. Teresa of Calcutta taught her sisters that the Jesus they received in the Eucharist in the morning

was the same Jesus they touched in the poorest of the poor all day, in what she called His distressing disguise. Her communities heard Mass daily precisely so that they could recognize Him on the street. That is the Temple sermon lived instead of preached.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2100** · outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must be the expression of spiritual sacrifice; God desires the humbled heart before the outward offering.
- **CCC 1430** · Jesus' call to conversion does not aim first at outward works but at the conversion of the heart; without it, penances remain sterile.
- **CCC 966** · Mary was exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, conformed to her Son. Background for the steelman chain; keep it in the leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Tonight the demolition verbs do their work on the deepest false hope of all: the Temple itself. If even the Temple can fall like Shiloh, then whatever God ultimately builds must be something a Babylonian army cannot burn. Say nothing; let the pressure accumulate.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Count the parallels accumulating tonight and keep them to yourself: a prophet confronts the Temple, quotes the same words, is seized, and is threatened with death by the religious authorities (ch. 26). One prophet escaped that trial. Another, quoting him, did not seek escape. Resolution comes in Session 11.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Chapter 26 is this thread's first open test: they tried to silence the word by killing the messenger, and the word survived on a precedent (Micah, quoted by the elders). A word spoken a century earlier saved Jeremiah's life. God is watching over His word, and it outlives its enemies. The scroll in Session 10 will raise the stakes.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can explain what the triple mantra of 7:4 was doing psychologically, and name modern equivalents.
2. Participants discover the Shiloh precedent and can state why sacred places do not override a broken covenant.
3. Participants find Matthew 21:13 themselves and articulate what it means that Jesus chose this sermon for the Temple courts.
4. Participants hear the queen of heaven objection at full strength and can answer it from 1 Kings 2 with the queen mother in hand.
5. Participants examine one place where their own religious practice risks becoming a mantra, and choose one act of justice to reunite worship with love.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 8 (the hard verse, 7:22) by reading the Dig Deeper box aloud instead of discussing, and trim the chapter 26 narrative (Q10) to the leader summary sentence. Never cut the Matthew 21 discovery or the steelman chain.

The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7 and 26

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You are not contained by buildings, and yet You choose to dwell among us. Guard us tonight from every false security, from words worn smooth, from worship that costs nothing. Give us honest hearts in Your house. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Have you ever said a prayer, or a whole Mass response, and realized afterward that you had not meant a single word? What makes familiar words go on autopilot?

W2. What is the difference between trusting someone and taking them for granted? How can you tell which one you are doing?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 7:1-4 ALOUD.

1. Where exactly does God tell Jeremiah to stand, and who is the audience? Why does the location matter?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

In the gate of the LORD's house, addressing everyone entering to worship (7:1-2). This is the church door at rush hour. God interrupts people on their way in to worship Him, which tells you something staggering: there is a way of going to the Temple that God Himself wants stopped at the door. The sermon is not aimed at pagans. It is aimed at churchgoers.

2. Verse 4 quotes the people's slogan: "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." Why three times? What happens to true words when they get repeated like this?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Repetition is how a slogan sounds: words worn smooth into a charm. The fact underneath was true, God really did dwell there, but they had turned a true fact into a false conclusion: nothing can happen to us here, no matter how we live. Deceptive words, God calls them (7:4). The most dangerous lies are the ones built out of true statements. Ask: what religious sentences do we repeat

on autopilot? I go to Mass. I was baptized. I'm a good person.

3. Now read 7:5-7. God states His terms for dwelling with them. Make the list: what specifically does He require? Notice who gets named.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Execute justice with one another; do not oppress the alien, the fatherless, or the widow; do not shed innocent blood; do not go after other gods (7:5-6). The named ones are the three classic categories of people with no power and no protector. God's test for the authenticity of worship is conducted outside the Temple, among the people nobody profits from treating well. The vertical relationship is verified horizontally.

4. Read 7:9-11. Walk through the sequence God describes: what do they do all week, and then where do they go? What does His "den of robbers" image actually mean? Hint: what does a robber use a den for?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal (7:9), then come stand before God in His house and say "We are delivered!" (7:10). A den is not where robbers rob; it is where they hide between robberies. They were using the Temple as a hideout: sin all week, then duck into holy ground and feel safe. Worship as a laundering operation. Keep this phrase in your pocket; someone else will use it soon.

5. Read 7:12-15. God says: go look at Shiloh. Leader, give the backstory in one minute: Shiloh housed the tabernacle and the ark for generations, until the ark was captured and the priests died in one day (1 Samuel 4). What is God's argument from Shiloh?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Precedent. God has already demonstrated once, on Israel's own soil, that He will abandon a sanctuary rather than bless a corrupt people camped inside it. Holy real estate never overrides a broken covenant. If Shiloh could fall, so can this house (7:14). To an audience for whom the Temple was theologically fireproof, this was close to blasphemy, which chapter 26 will prove.

6. Live discovery. Someone quoted this sermon, standing inside this same Temple complex, during the most famous week of His life. It is in Matthew 21. Find the verse.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Matthew 21:13: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers." Jesus, cleansing the Temple in Holy Week, fuses Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:11. He chose Jeremiah's words, on Jeremiah's sacred site, for a confrontation that intensified the collision with

the Temple leadership in the very week that ended at the cross. When Jesus wanted words for the corruption of worship, He reached for this chapter. Let the group sit with that: we just studied the sermon whose indictment Jesus Himself invoked.

Steelman: Is Mary the Queen of Heaven Jeremiah Condemned?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL PROTESTANT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Read 7:18: whole families baking cakes for the queen of heaven, and God says it provokes Him to anger. Now open a Catholic hymnal: Hail, Holy Queen. Catholics use the exact title of the goddess Jeremiah condemned, offer her flowers and candles, address prayers to her, crown her statues in May. Whatever Catholics call it, the practice looks identical to what this verse forbids. Isn’t Marian devotion the queen of heaven cult wearing Christian clothes?” Present it without flinching. The verbal parallel is real, and pretending otherwise loses the room.

7. First press: who is the queen of heaven in 7:18, and what are the people doing for her? Is anyone in the passage asking her to pray for them?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

She is a pagan goddess, likely Ishtar or Astarte, a deity worshiped alongside or instead of the LORD, with sacrificial offerings and drink offerings poured out “to other gods” (7:18). This is worship of a rival divinity. Catholic teaching is unambiguous that Mary is a creature, that sacrifice is offered to God alone, and that asking Mary’s intercession differs from adoring her exactly as asking a friend to pray for you differs from praying to your friend. The title is similar; the theology is opposite. But the title still needs explaining, so press on.

8. Live discovery. Second press: in the kingdom of David, there was a queen, but she was never the king’s wife. Watch what happens in 1 Kings 2:19 when this queen enters the throne room. Find it and report: who is she, and what does the king do?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

She is Bathsheba, the mother of King Solomon. The king rises to meet her, bows to her, and seats her on a throne at his right hand (1 Kings 2:19). In David’s kingdom the queen was the queen mother, the gebirah, honored by the king himself and serving as an intercessor who brought petitions to him. Catholics have long seen in the gebirah a fitting biblical pattern for Mary’s queenship: she is Queen because her Son is the Davidic King, exalted by Him and conformed to Him (CCC 966), and the queen mother’s honored, interceding place beside the throne gives that truth its Old Testament grammar. Jeremiah’s queen of heaven was a goddess who rivaled the LORD. Mary is a mother who magnifies Him: her greatest recorded command is “Do whatever he tells you.” Same word queen; opposite direction of worship.

READ JEREMIAH 7:21-23 ALOUD.

9. Verse 22 is startling: God says He did not command sacrifices at the Exodus, but “Obey my voice.” Yet Leviticus is full of commanded sacrifices. Is God against liturgy? How do we read this honestly?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

This is prophetic idiom for stating priority, a Hebrew way of saying not this without that. Compare Hosea 6:6, which prizes steadfast love above sacrifice, a verse Jesus cites twice as “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13; 12:7), while Himself worshiping in Temple and synagogue. God commanded the sacrifices; what He never commanded is sacrifice as a substitute for obedience. Obedience is the soul of sacrifice, not its rival. The Catholic application is direct: the sacraments truly work, which is precisely why treating them as magic charms while living unjustly repeats the Temple mantra with better theology.

DIG DEEPER · NOT LESS LITURGY, TRUER LITURGY

Some readers take 7:22 as Scripture against ritual religion. The Church reads it the other way: outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must express an interior sacrifice of the heart (CCC 2100), and Christ’s call to conversion aims first at the heart, without which outward works remain sterile (CCC 1430). Jeremiah is not the enemy of the liturgy. He is its conscience. The man preaching this sermon was a priest’s son standing at the Temple he loved.

10. (*Compress if short on time.*) Now flip to chapter 26, which appears to recount this Temple message, or one closely like it, from the outside. Read 26:7-11 and 26:16-19. What did preaching this sermon nearly cost Jeremiah, and what unexpectedly saved him?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

His life: priests, prophets, and people seized him, saying “You shall die!” (26:8). He was saved when elders cited precedent: the prophet Micah had preached the same doom a century earlier (26:18, quoting Micah 3:12), and King Hezekiah had repented instead of executing him. Notice what saved Jeremiah: a word of God spoken a hundred years before, still alive, still doing work. And notice the pattern: telling God’s people the truth about their worship is the most dangerous job in Israel. File that away.

11. Step back from the whole sermon. The people trusted a true thing, God’s real presence in His real Temple, in a false way. What are the Catholic versions of the triple mantra? Be specific and be personal.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group generate these, but be ready to name a few: I go to Mass every Sunday. I was baptized Catholic. My family has always been Catholic. I said my prayers. Every one of them names a genuine grace, and every one can be worn smooth into a den. The test Jeremiah gives is the test that still applies: does the grace reach the alien, the orphan, and the widow in your life, or does it stop at the

church door on your way out?

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Which of your own religious sentences is closest to becoming a mantra: true words you lean on so you do not have to change?

S2. Who is the alien, the fatherless, or the widow within your actual reach this week: the person with no power and no protector whom your worship should be reaching?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this Sunday, pick the single response you say most automatically and pray it once with total attention, meaning every word.
- Do one concrete act of justice or mercy this week for someone who cannot repay you or benefit you, and do it without telling anyone.
- Before you enter the church this Sunday, pause at the door for five seconds, remember where Jeremiah stood, and ask: Lord, let me not enter with deceptive words.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord, You desire obedience more than the fat of rams, and mercy more than sacrifice. Purify our worship. Let nothing we say to You in Your house be contradicted by what we do outside it. Make our lives a liturgy, and our liturgy true. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." (Jeremiah 7:23, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 7 and 26

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 7:1-4 · the gate, the audience, the triple mantra (Q1-Q2)
- Jeremiah 7:5-7 · God's terms: justice for alien, orphan, widow (Q3)
- Jeremiah 7:9-11 · the den of robbers (Q4)
- Jeremiah 7:12-15 · the Shiloh precedent (Q5)
- Jeremiah 7:18 · the queen of heaven (steelman)
- Jeremiah 7:21-23 · obedience and sacrifice (Q9, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 26:7-19 · the trial; the Micah precedent (Q10, compressible)

Old Testament Roots

- 1 Samuel 4 · the fall of Shiloh (leader background for Q5)
- Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 1:11-17; Micah 6:8 · the prophets on worship and justice
- Deuteronomy 10:18-19 · the Torah's heart for alien, orphan, widow
- Hosea 6:6 · mercy, not sacrifice (Q9)
- 1 Kings 2:19-20 · the queen mother enthroned (steelman live discovery, Q8)
- Micah 3:12 · quoted at Jeremiah's trial (26:18)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Matthew 21:12-13 · Jesus quotes the sermon (live discovery, Q6)
- John 2:19-21 · the true Temple, His body (leader background)
- Matthew 9:13; 12:7 · Jesus quoting Hosea 6:6 (Q9 support)

Catechism

- CCC 2100 · outward sacrifice must express interior sacrifice
- CCC 1430 · conversion of the heart first
- CCC 966 · Mary's queenship (steelman, leader only)

The Potter's House

Jeremiah 18-19

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the two vessels of these chapters and the difference between them: wet clay on the wheel, which a spoiled start does not doom, because the potter reworks it into another vessel; and the fired flask of chapter 19, shattered beyond mending. They learn from the parable's own explanation that God's declared judgments are conditional on human response, and they take the Romans 9 objection head-on with Jeremiah 18 open on the table.

Catholic Touchstone. God created us without us, but He did not will to save us without us (St. Augustine, quoted at CCC 1847). God predestines no one to go to hell (CCC 1037). The window in which clay is still wet is called mercy, and it is open now.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **A parable you walk into.** God does not hand Jeremiah a metaphor; He sends him downhill to a working pottery shop to watch (18:2-3). The potter's house was ordinary industry, wheel and kiln and clay. Revelation comes through a craftsman at work. Encourage your group to picture the scene concretely: the spinning wheel, the wet lump, the collapse, the strong hands starting again.
- **The key verb: reworked.** The vessel is "spoiled in the potter's hand," and he "reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do" (18:4). The spoiled start is not discarded. Same clay, new vessel. Everything pastoral in this session flows from that verb.
- **The parable explains itself, conditionally.** Verses 7-10 are rare and precious: God states His own hermeneutic of prophecy. A declared judgment against a nation or kingdom is revoked if it turns; a declared blessing is revoked if it turns to evil. Oracles of this kind are not fatalism; they are invitations with a deadline. This is the text that will carry the steelman.
- **The verbs return.** Look closely at 18:7 and 18:9: pluck up, break down, destroy... build, plant. Where have we heard those? Do not answer that question for the group; if someone notices aloud, congratulate them and move on. The Thread Watch has more.
- **Chapter 19: the fired flask.** The second sign act uses a finished earthenware flask, bought and then shattered in the valley of the son of Hinnom: "so that it can never be mended" (19:10-11). The sign's own logic supplies the contrast: wet clay can be reworked; a finished vessel, hardened past the wheel, can only break. The two chapters together preach one sermon: there is a window, and it closes.
- **Topheth, Hinnom, Gehenna.** The shattering happens at Topheth in the valley of Hinnom, where children had been burned to Baal (19:5-6; compare 7:31). In Hebrew, valley of Hinnom is *ge-hinnom*, which passes into the Greek of the Gospels as *Gehenna*: the word Jesus uses for hell. Jesus'

Gehenna imagery draws on this valley's dark history, Jeremiah 7 and 19 included, together with broader prophetic pictures of final judgment such as Isaiah 66:24.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The potter image begins on page two of the Bible: “the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground” (Genesis 2:7), where formed is the potter’s verb, *yatsar*. Isaiah uses the image for both comfort and rebuke: “we are the clay, and thou art our potter” (Isaiah 64:8), and woe to the pot that criticizes the potter (Isaiah 45:9). Nineveh proves 18:7-8 in narrative form: Jonah announced destruction with no conditions stated, Nineveh repented, God relented (Jonah 3:4-10), and Jonah was furious that the threat worked as an invitation.

Fulfillment. Paul carries the potter into Romans 9, the objection your group will press on tonight. Second Timothy carries it into hope: a person can purify himself and become “a vessel for noble use, consecrated” (2 Timothy 2:21), the same word over Jeremiah in the womb. And Matthew explicitly names Jeremiah when the Passion money buys the potter’s field (Matthew 27:9-10). Leader background: Matthew’s quotation is closest to Zechariah 11:12-13 in wording, yet he attributes it to Jeremiah, most likely to summon these chapters, the potter and the valley, as the backdrop of the Passion. Be honest about the puzzle if it comes up; the attribution is deliberate theology, not sloppiness.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus · *Against Heresies, Book IV*

St. Irenaeus counseled the believer to offer God a heart soft and tractable, like moist clay, and to keep the shape the Artist gave, lest hardening lose the mark of His fingers. It is not you who make God, he said; it is God who makes you. The one thing the clay can do is stay wet: stay workable, stay on the wheel, stay in the hands.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Sermon 169, quoted at CCC 1847*

St. Augustine put the mystery of grace and freedom in one sentence: God created us without us, but He did not will to save us without us. The potter is sovereign over the clay, and yet in the order of salvation He has chosen to make our turning part of His working. Jeremiah 18:7-10 is that sentence in prophetic form.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman · *Meditations and Devotions*

St. John Henry Newman wrote in his *Meditations and Devotions* that God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. Take the encouragement his words offer the workshop: the vessel on the wheel is not generic stock,

and we may trust the Potter to work even our spoiled starts toward the service He intends.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1847** · quoting St. Augustine: God did not will to save us without us; receiving mercy requires admitting our faults.
- **CCC 1431** · interior repentance is a radical reorientation of the whole life, a return to God with all our heart.
- **CCC 1037** · God predestines no one to go to hell; a willful turning away from God, persisted in until the end, is required. Essential for the steelman chain.
- **CCC 1033-1036** · the Church's sober teaching on hell as definitive self-exclusion: the fired flask in doctrinal form. Leader background; use with care and hope.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. The six verbs of 1:10 resurface almost verbatim in 18:7-10, and now we learn something new about them: they are conditional. Plucking up can be cancelled by repentance; building can be forfeited by evil. The demolition verbs are revocable. Which raises the question the group must not hear asked yet: what would it take for the building and planting to become unconditional, guaranteed, incapable of being forfeited? Hold that question until Session 8. If a participant notices the verbs, affirm the observation warmly and move on without developing it.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Quiet accumulation tonight: Matthew 27:9-10 ties Jeremiah's name to the potter's field bought with the blood money of the Passion. The Evangelist wants Jeremiah in the reader's mind at the cross. Keep it in yours; leave it out of theirs.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Note 18:18: the response to the sermon is a plot, "come, let us smite him with the tongue." The word draws violence; the word survives it. Session 10 brings the direct assault.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell both sign acts, the wheel and the flask, and state the difference between wet and fired clay in their own words.
2. Participants discover from 18:7-10 that God's own stated rule makes prophetic judgment conditional on human response.
3. Participants hear the Romans 9 case for double predestination at full strength and answer it with Jeremiah 18 and Romans 11:32.
4. Participants can explain where the word Gehenna comes from and what its history contributes to Jesus' warnings.

5. Participants identify one spoiled place in their own lives and bring it to the wheel this week, concretely.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: cut Question 5 (Jonah and Nineveh) first, then compress the Gehenna material (Q10) by reading its answer as a summary. Never cut the steelman chain; Romans 9 is the single most quoted text against Catholic teaching on free will, and your group deserves the full treatment.

The Potter's House

Jeremiah 18-19

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You formed us from the dust and You have never taken Your hands off the clay. We come to the wheel tonight. Where we are spoiled, rework us. Where we are hardening, soften us while there is time. Shape us into the vessel You intend, as it seems good to You. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Have you ever watched a real craftsman work: a welder, a baker, a carpenter, a potter? What surprised you about how they handled mistakes?

W2. When something you were building goes wrong partway through, what is your instinct: scrap it, force it, or start the same material over? What does that instinct cost you?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 18:1-4 ALOUD.

1. Notice how this revelation is delivered: God's first word is not the message but a sending. What does He tell Jeremiah to do before the explanatory word comes, and what does that method tell you about how God teaches?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words" (18:2). Jeremiah has to walk downhill and stand in a workshop watching a man's hands before the word comes. God teaches through the ordinary world: wheels, clay, craftsmen. It is the same divine pedagogy that will one day teach through seeds, nets, yeast, and vineyards. Creation is a classroom for those sent into it.

2. Verse 4 is the hinge. The vessel is spoiled in the potter's hand. What does the potter do next, and what does he not do? Stay inside the workshop image: what happens to the spoiled clay?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He does not throw the clay away, and he does not pretend the vessel is fine. "He reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do" (18:4). Same clay, new start, the potter's

judgment governing the new shape. A spoiled start is not a discarded life. If anyone in the room is carrying a collapsed vessel, a failed plan, a broken season, a ruined self-image, verse 4 is the whole Gospel in a workshop.

READ JEREMIAH 18:5-10 ALOUD, SLOWLY. VERSES 7-10 ARE RARE: GOD EXPLAINING HIS OWN RULES.

3. Walk through 18:7-10 carefully. God describes two announcements He might make about a nation. What cancels a declared judgment? What cancels a declared blessing? Who holds that variable?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A declared judgment is revoked if the nation “turns from its evil” (18:8); a declared blessing is revoked if the nation “does evil in my sight” (18:10). The variable is human response, and God states this as His standing policy for announcements concerning nations and kingdoms. Warnings of this kind are not fate; they are invitations with a deadline. The point of announcing doom is precisely so that the doom need not happen. Every warning is mercy wearing work clothes.

4. Someone sharp may object: then is God changeable? He “repents” of evil He planned (18:8)? How do we say this correctly?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God’s character never changes; that is exactly why His posture toward us changes when we change. A doctor who prescribes surgery for a sick man and cancels it when the man recovers has not been inconsistent; he has been consistently committed to health. The “change” is in the patient. Scripture speaks of God relenting from within our timeline; His eternal will, which includes His responsiveness to our turning, does not waver.

5. (*Cut first if short on time.*) The whole book of Jonah is 18:7-8 acted out. What did Jonah announce to Nineveh, what happened, and why was Jonah angry about it (Jonah 3:4-10; 4:1-2)?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jonah announced unconditional-sounding doom, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” Nineveh repented, and God relented (Jonah 3:4-10). Jonah was furious precisely because he knew the rule of Jeremiah 18: “I knew that thou art a gracious God... and repentest of evil” (4:2). Even the prophet resented how reliably God’s threats function as invitations. Nineveh proves that the conditional clause is not fine print. Pagans can activate it.

Steelman: Has the Potter No Right Over the Clay?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL REFORMED FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Paul takes this exact image and runs the other way with it. Romans 9: Jacob loved and Esau hated before birth, Pharaoh raised up to be hardened, and then the knockout: ‘Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?’ (Romans 9:21). Paul even voices your objection, ‘Why does he still find fault?’, and answers it by silencing it: ‘Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?’ (9:19-20). The clay does not talk back. And Romans 9:22-23 speaks of ‘vessels of wrath made for destruction’ and ‘vessels of mercy... prepared beforehand for glory’; from the sweep of the whole argument, Reformed readers conclude that both destinies rest on God’s sovereign decree. Isn’t double predestination simply what the potter image means?” This is the strongest text in the Reformed arsenal. Present it with full force; a weak version helps no one.

6. First press: Paul is quoting Jeremiah’s image, so go back to the source. In Jeremiah 18, the chapter that defines the potter and the clay, is the clay’s destiny fixed? What do verses 7-10, and verse 11, do to a fatalist reading of the image?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They forbid it. In the image’s own home chapter, the potter’s declared intentions reverse when the clay turns (18:7-10), and God immediately applies it: “Return, every one from his evil way” (18:11). You do not issue a call to return to clay whose destiny is sealed. Paul knew Jeremiah 18 intimately; whatever Romans 9 teaches, it cannot mean the potter image excludes human response, because the potter image was minted to include it.

7. Second press: never read Romans 9 without reading to the end of Paul’s argument. It runs through chapter 11. Someone find Romans 11:32 and read it aloud. Where does the potter’s argument actually land?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (Romans 11:32). The argument that begins with vessels of wrath ends with mercy upon all: even the hardening of Israel is temporary and serves salvation (11:11-12, 25-26). One important dimension of Romans 9 is God’s freedom in election to roles within salvation history, Jacob over Esau for the covenant line, Pharaoh as the stage for the Exodus, the office-versus-salvation distinction we drew in Session 1; and where the chapter does speak of wrath and glory, notice Paul’s own grammar: the vessels of mercy God Himself “prepared beforehand for glory,” while the vessels of wrath are simply “made for destruction”, with no matching claim that God prepared them for it, and even these God “endured with much patience” (9:22-23). The asymmetry is Trent’s and the Catechism’s: God’s initiative in salvation is absolute, and “God predestines no one to go to hell” (CCC 1037). A soul is only lost the way a flask is: by hardening itself past the wheel, freely, finally.

READ JEREMIAH 19:1-2 AND 19:10-11 ALOUD.

8. Chapter 19 is a second sign act with a second vessel. Compare the two: what kind of clay is on the wheel in chapter 18, and what kind of vessel does Jeremiah buy in chapter 19? Why can one be reworked and the other only shattered?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Chapter 18: wet clay, still on the wheel, still in the hands, workable throughout this present time of mercy. Chapter 19: a finished earthenware flask, bought from the potter, its shape set. A finished vessel cannot be reworked, only broken: “so that it can never be mended” (19:11). In the sign itself, the shattering is Judah’s coming historical judgment; the Church’s teaching on the soul’s final state gives the image its full weight as a type: hell is definitive self-exclusion, what remains when a person has hardened into a final shape against God (CCC 1033-1037). There is a window while the clay is wet, and the window closes.

9. Where does God tell Jeremiah to shatter the flask, and what happened in that place (19:2-6)? Why is the location part of the message?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The valley of the son of Hinnom, at Topheth, where Judah burned their own children to Baal, “which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind” (19:5). The place of the unthinkable sin becomes the stage of the irreversible sign. The flask shatters where the covenant people had already shattered everything the covenant meant. The geography preaches: some places in a life are where the breaking happens.

10. The valley of Hinnom in Hebrew is *ge-hinnom*. Say it a few times and guess what Greek word it became in the Gospels, the word Jesus uses for hell. What does this valley’s history pour into that word?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Gehenna. When Jesus warns of Gehenna, the valley’s real history is in the word: the place where God’s own people did the unthinkable, alongside broader prophetic images of judgment like Isaiah 66:24. Hell in Jesus’ vocabulary is not a mythological underworld; and the flask gives us a fitting image for what the Church actually teaches: the shape a soul freely hardens into when it refuses the wheel to the end. The Church teaches it with the same sobriety: hell is definitive self-exclusion from communion with God (cf. CCC 1033), and God predestines no one to it (CCC 1037). The valley is avoidable. That is the entire point of the warning.

11. Live discovery. The clay is not always passive in the New Testament. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul describes what a person can become in a great house. Find verses 20-21: what can a vessel do, and listen for a word we memorized in Session 1.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house" (2 Timothy 2:21). The clay can cooperate: purify himself, and become consecrated, the very word spoken over Jeremiah in the womb (1:5). The wheel is where God's sovereign shaping and our free turning meet, and Scripture refuses to surrender either one.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Where in your life is there a spoiled vessel: something that collapsed on the wheel, that you have been treating as garbage rather than as clay still in His hands?

S2. Hardening is gradual: clay dries before it fires. Is there any area where you can feel yourself drying, getting less workable, more defended, harder to turn? What would keep the clay wet this week?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Take the spoiled thing you named tonight and hand it over explicitly in prayer once this week: Lord, this is the collapsed vessel. Rework it as it seems good to You. Then leave it on the wheel.
- Practice staying soft once this day: when you are corrected, criticized, or contradicted this week, resist the first hardening and ask instead, Lord, is Your hand in this pressure?
- Pray one Our Father slowly for someone you are tempted to write off as fired clay, finished, hopeless. God relents when people turn; ask Him for their turning.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are we in Your hand. We bring You our spoiled vessels and our drying edges. Rework what has collapsed. Soften what has hardened. And keep us on the wheel, under Your fingers, until we are the vessel You intended. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 18-19

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 18:1-4 · the workshop; the reworked vessel (Q1-Q2)
- Jeremiah 18:5-11 · God's stated rule of conditional prophecy (Q3-Q4, steelman Q6)
- Jeremiah 18:18 · the plot against the prophet (leader background, Thread 3)
- Jeremiah 19:1-6 · the flask, Topheth, the valley of Hinnom (Q8-Q9)
- Jeremiah 19:10-11 · shattered, never mended (Q8, contrast with 18:4)

Old Testament Roots

- Genesis 2:7 · the LORD God formed (yatsar) man from dust
- Isaiah 64:8; 45:9 · the potter image in comfort and rebuke
- Jonah 3:4-10; 4:1-2 · Nineveh proves the conditional rule (Q5, cuttable)
- Jeremiah 7:31 · Topheth introduced (cross-reference from Session 3)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Romans 9:14-24 · the potter and the clay (steelman)
- Romans 11:11-12, 25-26, 32 · where the argument lands (steelman Q7, live find)
- 2 Timothy 2:20-21 · the vessel that purifies itself (live discovery, Q11)
- Matthew 27:9-10 · the potter's field named for Jeremiah (leader background, Thread 2)

Catechism

- CCC 1847 · Augustine: He did not will to save us without us
- CCC 1431 · interior repentance, radical reorientation
- CCC 1037 · God predestines no one to hell (steelman)
- CCC 1033-1036 · hell as definitive self-exclusion (leader background)

Fire in My Bones

Jeremiah 20

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Scripture canonizes a prayer of raw protest: Jeremiah, beaten and put in the stocks, accuses God to His face, and the Holy Spirit preserved every word. They trace the whiplash of chapter 20, accusation, compulsion, confidence, praise, and despair, all in one poem, and they find lament on the lips of Jesus Himself. The goal is a permanently enlarged prayer life: God prefers our honest anger to our polite absence.

Catholic Touchstone. Prayer is a battle (CCC 2725), the experience of dryness is real (CCC 2731), and the prophets drew the strength for their mission from wrestling with God in prayer (cf. CCC 2584). On the cross, the Word incarnate gave voice to the anguish of every age by praying a psalm of lament (cf. CCC 2605-2606).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The first blood.** Chapter 20 opens with the first recorded physical violence against Jeremiah: Pashhur the priest, chief officer in the Temple, has him beaten and locked overnight in the stocks at the Benjamin Gate (20:1-2). Note who does it: not a pagan, but a priest. The promise of 1:19, they will fight against you, is now literal.
- **The Confessions of Jeremiah.** Scholars use this name for a series of intensely personal laments scattered through the book, commonly delimited as 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; and the climax, 20:7-18. No other prophet lets us this far inside. Tonight's text is the rawest of them all.
- **The shocking verb of 20:7.** The Hebrew verb *pathah* in "thou hast deceived me" is strong and uncomfortable: elsewhere it can mean to entice, persuade, even seduce. Translations soften or sharpen it variously; the RSV2CE's "deceived" is a fair middle. Do not sand this down for your group. Jeremiah is accusing God of luring him into a vocation and then leaving him to the mockery. And the Spirit kept the accusation in the Bible.
- **The anatomy of the poem.** Accusation (20:7-8), compulsion (20:9), conspiracy (20:10), confidence (20:11-12), praise (20:13), and then, with no warning, the curse of his own birthday (20:14-18). The poem ends in the dark. The canon does not tidy it up. That editorial silence is itself a pastoral teaching: some prayers do not resolve by bedtime, and they are still prayers.
- **The fire.** Verse 9 is the hinge of the chapter and one of the great vocation texts of Scripture: Jeremiah tries to quit, and the word becomes "a burning fire shut up in my bones." He cannot hold it in. The call outlasts the desire to be called.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. A third of the Psalter is lament, and Jeremiah prays in its grammar: complaint, petition, and the strange pivot to praise (compare Psalm 13's six verses, which travel the same arc as chapter 20). The curse of the birthday (20:14-18) closely echoes the birth-curse that opens Job 3. Israel's prayer book always had a section for the dark; Jeremiah simply prays it with his own blood.

Fulfillment. Lament is not sub-Christian; it is Christic. In Gethsemane the Son tells His friends His soul is sorrowful even to death and begs the Father to remove the cup (Matthew 26:38-39). On the cross He prays the first line of Psalm 22 (Mark 15:34). Hebrews says He offered prayers "with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). And Paul inherits the fire in the bones: "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Your group will find the Gethsemane and Paul texts themselves.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Athanasius · *Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms*

St. Athanasius wrote that the Psalms are unlike the rest of Scripture in one way: whoever sings them finds them a mirror, seeing in them the movements of his own soul, and receives words for wounds he could not name. The lament tradition Jeremiah prays in exists so that no human anguish is ever left without a prayer to carry it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John of the Cross · *The Dark Night*

St. John of the Cross, a Doctor of the Church, taught that God sometimes withdraws the felt consolations of prayer precisely in the souls He is drawing closest, purifying love of its dependence on feelings. The darkness that seems like God's absence can be the shadow cast by His approach. Jeremiah's night, honestly prayed, is not the opposite of intimacy with God. It can be its deepest form.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa of Calcutta · *Come Be My Light (her published letters)*

The world discovered after her death that St. Teresa of Calcutta endured decades of interior darkness, feeling unwanted by the God she served with radiant joy. Her letters lament with a rawness worthy of chapter 20, and she kept serving, kept praying, kept smiling at the poor. Fidelity in the dark, she shows us, is not hypocrisy. It is heroism.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2725** · prayer is a battle against ourselves and against the tempter; CCC 2731 names the experience of dryness, when the heart feels separated from God.
- **CCC 2584** · the prophets drew light and strength for their mission from encounter with God in prayer, often in struggle and complaint.
- **CCC 2605-2606** · on the cross Jesus prayed a psalm of lament, and in that cry the anguish of humanity in every age found its voice before the Father.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Rest tonight. The thread advances in Session 7, in a way nobody will expect. Do not touch it.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Heavy accumulation tonight, all of it hiding in plain sight: struck by the Temple authorities, mocked all day, betrayed by familiar friends who watch for his fall (20:10), praying anguish in the night. The group will openly compare Gethsemane in Q8; let them. The comparisons are breadcrumbs. The reveal, Matthew 16:14, stays sealed until Session 11.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Tonight the word proves indestructible from the inside: Jeremiah himself tries to suppress it, and it burns through him (20:9). Even the prophet cannot silence the word entrusted to him. File the fire image: it returns from God's side of the equation next session.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can trace the emotional anatomy of 20:7-18 and can say out loud that Scripture canonizes protest prayer.
2. Participants discover the fire in the bones and can articulate the difference between wanting a vocation and being had by one.
3. Participants hear the “always rejoice, never lament” position at full strength and answer it with the Psalter, chapter 20, and Gethsemane.
4. Participants find Christ's own laments themselves and can explain why lament is Christic rather than faithless.
5. Participants leave with one honest prayer they have been avoiding, and a concrete plan to pray it this week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: cut Question 3 (Pashhur's new name) first, then compress Question 9 (the Job 3 parallel) into a single leader sentence. Never cut the steelman or the Gethsemane discovery. This session heals people; give it room.

Fire in My Bones

Jeremiah 20

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You already know everything we feel, so nothing we say tonight can shock You. Give us the courage of Your prophet: to bring You the anger, the exhaustion, and the questions, instead of hiding them politely. You prefer our honest wrestling to our careful distance. So here we are. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Growing up, what did you learn, from family or church or anywhere, about which emotions were acceptable to show and which were not?

W2. Have you ever been angry at God, or wanted to be, and stopped yourself? What stopped you?

Leader note: W2 will surface real pain in some groups. Do not fix anyone. Tonight's text will do the pastoral work; your job is to keep the room safe and unhurried.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 20:1-6 ALOUD.

1. Who has Jeremiah beaten and locked in the stocks, and what is his job? Why does the identity of the persecutor matter?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Pashhur, a priest, the chief officer in the house of the LORD (20:1). The first assault the book narrates comes from religious authority, not pagan power. The promise of 1:19 has come literally true, and from the least expected direction. The application reaches across the centuries: wounds inflicted by one's own religious leaders and faith community cut deepest, and Scripture does not pretend otherwise. If someone in your group carries such a wound, this text sees them.

READ JEREMIAH 20:7-10 ALOUD, SLOWLY. WARN THE GROUP: THIS IS THE RAWEST PRAYER IN THE PROPHETS.

2. Verse 7 opens with an accusation most of us would be afraid to pray: "O LORD, thou hast deceived me." What exactly is Jeremiah accusing God of? And here is the real question: why is this prayer in the Bible?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He accuses God of luring him into the prophetic office, overpowering him, and leaving him to daily mockery (20:7-8). The Hebrew verb is even stronger than “deceived”; it can mean enticed, even seduced. And the Holy Spirit preserved every syllable. That is the point your group must not miss: the Bible itself shows us that accusation brought TO God can be real prayer, because it keeps the sufferer inside the relationship, facing Him. Jeremiah stays in the conversation, and staying in the conversation is what honest anger is for.

- 3.** (*Cut first if short on time.*) Back up to 20:3-4: Jeremiah renames his persecutor “Terror on every side.” Now look at 20:10: who is quoting that phrase back at him? What is being done to Jeremiah’s own words?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

His enemies have turned his prophecy into a taunt, a nickname: “Terror on every side! Denounce him!” (20:10). Even his familiar friends watch for his fall. They weaponize the man’s own preaching against him. Mockery that quotes you is the loneliest kind, and verse 10 adds the sharpest detail in the chapter: the watchers are friends.

READ JEREMIAH 20:9 ALOUD TWICE. THIS IS THE HINGE OF THE SESSION.

- 4.** Jeremiah announces his resignation from prophecy in the first half of the verse. What defeats the resignation? Where is the fire, and whose is it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“If I say, ‘I will not mention him’... there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20:9). He tries to quit and discovers the word of God is not a job he holds but a fire that holds him. This is the anatomy of Jeremiah’s prophetic vocation: not the absence of the desire to quit, but the presence of something stronger than that desire. Not every genuine call burns this way, discernment has gentler seasons, but when God’s claim on a life is real, it tends to outlast our resignations.

- 5. Live discovery.** A New Testament apostle describes his own preaching with the same burning compulsion, almost word for word. It is in 1 Corinthians 9. Find it.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 9:16: “Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” Paul, like Jeremiah, does not preach because it pays or because it is pleasant; he preaches because the fire gives him no alternative he can live with. Ask the group: is there anything in your life, any good you would keep doing even if it cost you, that has this signature on it?

Steelman: Should a Christian Ever Lament?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A DEVOUT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Scripture commands joy, not complaint. ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice’ (Philippians 4:4). ‘Give thanks in all circumstances’ (1 Thessalonians 5:18). ‘Do all things without grumbling’ (Philippians 2:14). We live on the far side of the Resurrection; the victory is won. Grief itself is human, Jesus wept, but there is a line between faithful sorrow and accusatory prayer: sorrow brought to God in trust honors Him; hurling charges at God, calling Him a deceiver as Jeremiah does, crosses into irreverence no resurrection people should imitate. Real faith may weep, but it praises through the pain and refuses to put God in the dock.” Present it warmly; this position is usually held by sincere people, and half your group may secretly hold it.

6. First press: run the numbers on Israel’s inspired prayer book. Roughly what share of the Psalms are laments? And who kept praying them after the Resurrection?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Laments are the largest single category in the Psalter, roughly a third of the book, and the Church has prayed the Psalms from her earliest days; the Liturgy of the Hours still puts Psalm 13 and Psalm 88 on Christian lips today. If lament were unbelief, the Holy Spirit inspired an enormous amount of it, and the Church has been sinning in choir for two thousand years. The command to rejoice always sits in the same canon as “How long, O LORD?” Scripture holds both, so our theology must.

7. Second press: look inside tonight’s poem itself. Find the verse of soaring praise, then find what follows it. What does the sequence of 20:13 and 20:14 do to the idea that praise and lament are opposites?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Verse 13 is pure doxology: “Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD!” Verse 14 curses the day of his birth. No transition, no apology. In the same inspired poem, from the same faithful man, in the same hour. Praise and lament are not opposites; they are the two lungs of honest prayer, and Jeremiah breathes with both. The command to rejoice always is not a command to feel one emotion always; it is the deep confidence in God that makes telling Him everything possible.

8. Live discovery. Now the decisive evidence. Find what Jesus Himself prayed in the garden the night before He died (Matthew 26, around verse 38), and what He prayed from the cross (Mark 15, around verse 34). Read both aloud.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death... My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:38-39). And from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), the opening line of Psalm 22, a lament. The sinless Son of God lamented, in words the Spirit had prepared centuries in advance. Lament is not sub-Christian. It is Christic. Hebrews summarizes

His whole praying life as “loud cries and tears” (Hebrews 5:7). Any piety too polished for Gethsemane is too polished for the Gospel.

DIG DEEPER • THE CRY THAT CARRIES EVERY CRY

The Catechism teaches that in His cry from the cross, praying the psalm of lament, the incarnate Word took up the anguish of humanity in every age and gave it a voice before the Father (cf. CCC 2605-2606). This means something immense for your group: when you lament in Christ, you are not straying from His prayer. You are inside it.

9. (*Compress if short on time.*) Read 20:14-18. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth, and the poem simply ends there, in the dark. Job opens his mouth the same way (Job 3:1-3). Why do you think the canon leaves the chapter unresolved instead of adding a happy ending?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because some nights do not resolve by bedtime, and the Bible refuses to lie about that. The resolution of Jeremiah’s anguish exists, but it lives in the rest of the book and the rest of the story, not in a tidy verse 19. The canon’s silence is pastoral: it gives everyone whose prayer is currently unresolved a chapter that looks like their life, inside the word of God. You are allowed to end a prayer without a bow on it. God keeps the conversation open overnight.

10. Step back. In verse 11 Jeremiah declares, mid-lament: “But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior.” Where have we heard “I am with you” before in this study? What has happened to that promise between chapter 1 and chapter 20?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It was the founding promise of his call: “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (1:8, 1:19). In chapter 1 it was a word received; in chapter 20 it is a word tested, and it holds, even while everything else in Jeremiah’s prayer is on fire. Notice that the confidence of verse 11 and the accusation of verse 7 live in the same prayer. Faith is not the absence of protest. It is protest that still says “But the LORD is with me.”

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. What prayer have you been avoiding because it felt too angry, too raw, or too faithless to say to God?

S2. Where in your life is there a fire in the bones: something God has put in you that you cannot hold in, even when you are weary of it?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Once this week, pray the prayer you named in S1, out loud, alone, unedited. Start with the words “Lord, here is what I actually feel,” and do not clean it up. End with one line of 20:13 if you can; if you cannot, end like 20:18 and trust Him with the rest.
- Pray Psalm 13 slowly one evening this week. Notice the turn at verse 5, and notice that the psalmist earned it by praying verses 1-4 first.
- Check on one person you suspect is in a dark night. Do not fix them. Sit with them the way this chapter sits with us: honestly, without a forced happy ending.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, we bring You the prayers we have been hiding. The anger, the weariness, the questions with no answers yet. You kept Your prophet's protest in Your book, so we trust You can bear ours. Keep the fire burning in our bones, and stay with us as a dread warrior through the night. Through Christ our Lord, who prayed with loud cries and tears. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me." (Jeremiah 20:11, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 20

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 20:1-6 · Pashhur, the beating, the stocks (Q1, Q3)
- Jeremiah 20:7-10 · the accusation; the taunt; the friends who watch (Q2-Q3)
- Jeremiah 20:9 · fire shut up in the bones (Q4, hinge)
- Jeremiah 20:11-13 · dread warrior; sudden praise (Q7, Q10, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 20:14-18 · the curse of the birthday; the unresolved ending (Q9)

Old Testament Roots

- Psalm 13 · the lament arc in miniature (steelman Q6, Live It)
- Psalm 22:1 · the lament Jesus prayed (Q8)
- Job 3:1-3 · the birthday curse parallel (Q9, compressible)
- Jeremiah 1:8, 1:19 · the founding promise recalled (Q10)
- The Confessions of Jeremiah · 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-18 (leader background; scholarly boundaries vary slightly)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Matthew 26:38-39 · Gethsemane (live discovery, Q8)
- Mark 15:34 · the cry from the cross (live discovery, Q8)
- Hebrews 5:7 · loud cries and tears (Q8 support)
- 1 Corinthians 9:16 · woe to me if I do not preach (live discovery, Q5)
- Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:18 · the steelman texts

Catechism

- CCC 2725 · prayer is a battle
- CCC 2584 · the prophets formed in wrestling prayer
- CCC 2605-2606 · the cry from the cross carries every human cry

The Righteous Branch

Jeremiah 23

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that in the middle of the book's darkest indictment, God makes His first great messianic promise: a righteous Branch for David, a King whose name is "The LORD is our righteousness." They uncover the wordplay hiding in the last king's name, take the imputed-versus-infused righteousness debate head-on, and meet God's word as fire and hammer, the same fire that burned in Jeremiah's bones.

Catholic Touchstone. Justification is not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man (CCC 1989, citing the Council of Trent). When God declares a thing, His word accomplishes it; the righteousness He gives really makes righteous.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The failed shepherds.** In the ancient Near East, "shepherd" was standard royal language: kings were shepherds of their people. Chapter 23 opens with a woe against Judah's shepherds, her kings, who have scattered and destroyed the flock (23:1-2). Chapter 22, just before, names them: Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah, a portrait gallery of royal failure. Against that gallery, God promises to shepherd the flock Himself and to raise up faithful shepherds (23:3-4).
- **The Branch.** "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch" (23:5). The Hebrew *tsemach* (branch, shoot, sprout) became a technical messianic term: the growth from David's felled tree (compare Isaiah 11:1; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). The dynasty looks like a stump; God promises new, living growth from the royal line.
- **The name and the pun.** The Branch's name: *YHWH tsidqenu*, "The LORD is our righteousness" (23:6). Now the sting: the reigning king when Jerusalem falls is Zedekiah, *tsidqiyyahu*, a name built on the very same righteousness-root, "The LORD is righteousness." Many readers hear a pointed wordplay: the last king wears righteousness as a label and lives its opposite. The Branch will not merely bear the name; He will be what the name says. Let the group discover this contrast in Q4; it is one of the best moments of the night.
- **The false prophets.** The second half of the chapter (23:9-40) turns on the prophets who preach comfort without commission: "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran" (23:21). Their test failure: they never stood in God's council (23:18, 22) and they steal words from each other (23:30). Against their padded messages God sets His own word: "Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (23:29).
- **A word on fulfillment timing.** Judah's monarchy never recovered after the exile; no son of David sat on a throne in Jerusalem again. The promise of 23:5-6 therefore stood open for six centuries,

until the angel told a virgin betrothed to a man “of the house of David” that her Son would receive “the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:27, 32). Christians do not read the Branch into Jeremiah; we read Jeremiah the way the apostles did, forward to its only claimant.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The promise rests on 2 Samuel 7, God’s covenant promise to David of an everlasting throne, a promise the psalms remember as sworn on oath (Psalm 89:3-4). Isaiah had already seen the shoot from Jesse’s stump (Isaiah 11:1). Ezekiel, Jeremiah’s contemporary in exile, hears the same shepherd oracle: God Himself will shepherd the flock, through “my servant David” (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23). Zechariah, after the exile, is still waiting: “Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch” (Zechariah 3:8).

Fulfillment. Jesus stands up in Ezekiel 34’s frame and claims it: “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), the owner-shepherd against the hirelings. Gabriel hands Him the Davidic throne (Luke 1:32-33). And the name of 23:6 unfolds across the epistles: God made Christ “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30); “in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). How that becoming works is tonight’s steelman, and it is one of the two or three questions on which the Reformation turned.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *On the Priesthood*

St. John Chrysostom famously evaded ordination in his youth, and when he wrote *On the Priesthood* he explained the awe behind the flight: the shepherd answers to God for the sheep. Anyone who has read the prophets’ woes against shepherds who feed themselves can feel why. Anyone your group knows in ministry, priest, catechist, parent, carries a share of that accountability, and deserves a share of your prayers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux · *Advent Sermon 5, on the middle coming*

St. Bernard preached that the Lord comes three times: once in flesh at Bethlehem, once in glory at the end, and, hidden between them, an intermediate coming in grace to the soul that watches. “The days are coming,” said Jeremiah, and they came; and Bernard insists the hidden coming continues, to every heart that leaves the door open. Messianic hope is not only about the past tense.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Letter 194, to Sixtus; cf. CCC 2006-2009*

St. Augustine resolved the anxiety about our standing before God in one line: when God crowns our merits, He crowns nothing other than His own gifts. Everything righteous in us is His gift first, which is why “The LORD is our righteousness” and “grace really transforms us” are not rivals. The

gift is real precisely because the Giver is generous enough to make it truly ours.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1989** · quoting the Council of Trent: justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man. Central to the steelman chain; keep it in the leader guide.
- **CCC 1995** · the Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life; justification entails the sanctification of the whole being. Steelman support; leader guide.
- **CCC 2009** · filial adoption makes us capable of true merit, which is itself God's gift; compare St. Augustine's teaching that in crowning our merits God crowns His own gifts (Letter 194).
- **CCC 754** · the Church is a sheepfold whose one necessary door is Christ, the Good Shepherd.
- **CCC 436** · Christ means anointed: Israel's kings, priests, and prophets were anointed, and Jesus fulfills all three in the messianic hope of Israel.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Two developments tonight, both silent. First: "Behold, the days are coming" (23:5) is Jeremiah's signature formula for guaranteed future hope, and it introduces the Branch here. The identical formula opens the passage where the sealed guesses are answered. Second: the flock God gathers "shall be fruitful and multiply" (23:3), creation language, Eden language, planting language. The promise is germinating in plain sight. Say absolutely nothing; two sessions remain.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Light touch: the Branch is a King who is also, by His name, the answer to everything the prophet has suffered for. The suffering messenger and the promised King are converging. Do not draw the lines yet.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Direct development: "Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer?" (23:29). Last session the fire was in the prophet's bones from the inside (20:9); tonight God claims it from His side. Same fire. The counterfeit prophets deal in stolen words and padded dreams; the true word burns and breaks. Session 10 will put the claim through a literal fire.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can explain the shepherd-king convention and why chapter 23's woe is aimed at the throne.
2. Participants discover the Branch promise and the Zedekiah wordplay, and can state what the name "The LORD is our righteousness" promises.
3. Participants hear the imputed-righteousness case at full strength and can give the Catholic response: God's declaration accomplishes what it declares.

4. Participants can name the tests that expose false prophecy in 23:9-40, and apply them to voices in their own lives.

5. Participants leave praying for one shepherd by name, and submitting one comfortable message they consume to the fire-and-hammer test.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 8 (the marks of false prophecy) by reading its answer as a summary, and cut Question 10 (Ezekiel 34) to the single John 10 connection. Never cut the Zedekiah wordplay or the steelman chain; they are the discoveries this session exists for.

The Righteous Branch

Jeremiah 23

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You promised Your scattered flock a Shepherd and Your fallen dynasty a Branch. We confess how often we have trusted failed shepherds and comfortable voices. Tonight, gather us, feed us on Your true word, even where it burns and breaks, and write Your righteousness where our own has run out. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Tell us about a leader, in any arena, who genuinely used their position for the people under them rather than for themselves. What did that cost them?

W2. When you hear the word "righteousness," what feeling comes first: comfort, pressure, guilt, boredom? Why do you think that is?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 23:1-4 ALOUD.

1. In the ancient world, "shepherd" was royal language: kings were called shepherds of their people. So who is this woe actually aimed at, and what are the two charges in verses 1-2?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The kings of Judah. The charges: they destroy and scatter the sheep, and they have not attended to the flock (23:1-2). Note God's pointed wordplay in verse 2: you have not attended to them, so I will attend to you. The flock, meanwhile, God calls "the sheep of my pasture": the people never stopped being His. Leaders in God's house manage what they do not own, and the Owner audits.

2. In verses 3-4, who takes over the shepherding, and in what order? What is promised to the flock under the new arrangement?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God Himself first: "I will gather the remnant of my flock... I will bring them back" (23:3), and then He appoints shepherds under Him (23:4). The order matters: the answer to failed human leadership is not merely better humans but God taking the crook into His own hands, and then sharing it. And the restored flock "shall be fruitful and multiply" (23:3): the words of Eden. When God shepherds,

creation's original blessing starts working again.

READ JEREMIAH 23:5-6 ALOUD, TWICE. THIS IS THE FIRST GREAT MESSIANIC PROMISE OF THE BOOK.

3. Take the promise apart phrase by phrase: what is a “Branch,” why “for David,” and what will this King actually do?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A branch is new growth from a tree that looks dead: the Davidic dynasty is about to be cut down to a stump, and God promises a living shoot from the royal line (compare Isaiah 11:1). “For David” anchors it in the covenant promise of 2 Samuel 7, an everlasting throne, which the psalms remember as sworn on oath (Psalm 89:3-4). And the Branch’s job description is the exact inverse of the failed shepherds: he shall “reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (23:5). Not merely possess righteousness. Execute it. Righteousness in Jeremiah is something a king does to a land, not a label he wears.

4. The Branch gets a throne name in verse 6: “The LORD is our righteousness.” Now the discovery: the king on the throne when Jerusalem falls is named Zedekiah, a name built on the very same righteousness-root. Sit with that. What is this wordplay doing?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The last king of Judah wears the correct theology as a name tag and lives its opposite: Zedekiah is weak, faithless, and presides over the catastrophe. The Branch will not merely be called what Zedekiah is called; He will be what the name says. It is the difference between a label and a life. God’s promise, hiding inside a pun: the day is coming when “The LORD is our righteousness” stops being a slogan on a failing king and becomes a Person on an everlasting throne.

5. Live discovery. Six centuries later, an angel promises a young woman a Son and mentions this exact throne. It is in Luke 1, in the annunciation. Find the verses about David.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke 1:32-33: “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Joseph is “of the house of David” (1:27). No son of David had sat on a throne in Jerusalem for six hundred years; the promise of the Branch stood open the entire time, and Gabriel closes it by name. Every Sunday the Creed makes your group recite the fulfillment: “and his kingdom will have no end.” They have been quoting Luke 1:33 all their lives.

Steelman: Is Righteousness Imputed or Infused?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL REFORMED FRIEND WOULD

The case: “The name settles it: the LORD is our righteousness, not us, never us. ‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21): a great exchange, our sin credited to Him, His righteousness credited to us. Paul renounces ‘a righteousness of my own, based on law’ and claims instead ‘the righteousness from God that depends on faith’ (Philippians 3:9). Luther called the believer simul iustus et peccator: righteous and sinner at once, righteous by Christ’s imputed record, not by anything infused in us, because look at us. The Catholic idea that righteousness is infused into sinners puts salvation back on shaky human ground and robs Christ of His glory. Justification is God declaring us righteous in Christ, full stop.” Give this its full weight; it is the doctrinal heart of the Reformation, and it is motivated by a true instinct: all glory to grace.

6. Start with the common ground, because it is enormous. From tonight’s text and this study so far, what does the Catholic gladly grant our Reformed friend about where righteousness comes from?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Everything about its source. The name is our confession too: the LORD is our righteousness, not self-made moral achievement. Grace is first; the preparation for grace is itself grace (CCC 2001, from Session 1); and when God crowns our merits He crowns His own gifts (St. Augustine, Letter 194; cf. CCC 2006-2009). No Catholic is permitted to believe in a righteousness of our own, based on law; the Church condemned that as Pelagianism before the Reformation was ever thought of. The dispute is not whether righteousness is God’s gift. It is what the gift does on arrival.

7. Now press on the text. When God declares something, what happens? Start at the beginning: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Then look at tonight’s chapter: what does God say His word is like (23:29)? So when God declares a sinner righteous, what kind of declaration is it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God’s declarations create what they declare. “Let there be light,” and there was light. His word is “like fire... like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces” (23:29): it does things to what it touches. So the Catholic question to the imputation-only view is gentle but firm: is God’s verdict of righteousness the one word of God that leaves reality unchanged? Scripture says otherwise: “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified” (1 Corinthians 6:11); God’s love “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). The Council of Trent put it exactly: justification is “not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (CCC 1989). Imputation says God treats us as righteous; the Catholic faith says His word makes us so, truly if not yet totally, which is why the gift keeps growing and why the sacraments keep feeding it. The Branch does not merely wear the name over us. He executes righteousness in the land of the soul.

DIG DEEPER • WHY THIS IS GOOD NEWS

Be fair to our friend first: classical Reformed theology warmly affirms real sanctification, the Spirit truly changing believers over a lifetime. The dispute is narrower and deeper: is that renewal intrinsic to justification itself, or a separate work alongside a purely forensic verdict? The Catholic claim is that God's justifying word does what it says, like "Let there be light": the verdict itself transforms, so sanctity is not a second project running beside our standing with God but the gift's own unfolding in us. The Catholic claim is ultimately the more grace-filled one: God's gift is generous enough to become truly ours.

READ JEREMIAH 23:16-22 ALOUD.

8. (*Compress if short on time.*) God profiles the false prophets. Gather the marks from verses 16-22: what do they preach, to whom, and what is the credential they lack?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They speak "visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD" (23:16); they say "It shall be well with you" to those who despise God's word, and "No evil shall come upon you" to the stubborn (23:17). The missing credential: they never "stood in the council of the LORD" (23:18, 22); "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran" (23:21). The profile of false prophecy in every age: comfort without commission, peace on demand, a message that never costs the audience anything. If a voice in your life only ever tells you what you want to hear, it fails Jeremiah's test.

9. Read 23:29 aloud. God gives two images for His true word: fire and hammer. We met fire last week. Where was it, and what does it mean that the same word is fire in the prophet and hammer on the rock?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Last week the fire was shut up in Jeremiah's bones (20:9), burning from the inside when he tried to suppress it. Tonight God claims it from His side: my word is like fire. Same fire, both directions. The true word of God is never inert: it burns the one who carries it and breaks what is hardened in the one who hears it. Which gives your group a practical test for every sermon, podcast, and devotional they consume: does this word ever burn me or break anything in me, or does it only ever pad the walls?

10. Live discovery. (*Cut to the single connection if short on time.*) Someone eventually stood up and claimed the shepherd's office of 23:3-4 in the first person. It is in John 10. Find the claim, and find what this Shepherd does that hirelings will not.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). The hireling flees because the sheep are not his; the failed shepherds of Jeremiah 23 fed themselves.

Jesus is the owner-shepherd of 23:3, God gathering the flock in person, and the Branch-king of 23:5, in one figure. The proof of ownership He offers is not a title but a death: what He does for the flock that no hireling in history has ever done on purpose.

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Where in your life have you been settling for the Zedekiah version: the right label, the right vocabulary, worn over an unchanged life?

S2. Which voices you listen to regularly would pass Jeremiah's test, words that sometimes burn and break you, and which only ever comfort you?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray daily, by name, for one shepherd: your pastor, your bishop, a catechist, a parent. The woe of 23:1 tells you what their office weighs; carry a corner of it this week.
- Apply the fire-and-hammer test once: after the next sermon, podcast, or spiritual book chapter you take in, ask on paper: did this burn or break anything in me, or only soothe me? Adjust your diet accordingly.
- Each morning this week, before your feet hit the floor, pray the throne name once over your own day: The LORD is our righteousness, and ask Him to execute it in you, not just declare it over you.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, righteous Branch of David, You are what every failed shepherd was supposed to be, and Your name is the answer to our emptiness: The LORD is our righteousness. Reign in us. Let Your word fall on us as fire and hammer where we have hardened, and as pasture where we are scattered and hungry. Gather Your flock, and make us fruitful. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jeremiah 23:5, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 23

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 23:1-2 · woe to the shepherd-kings (Q1)
- Jeremiah 23:3-4 · God gathers; fruitful and multiply (Q2)
- Jeremiah 23:5-6 · the righteous Branch; the throne name (Q3-Q4, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 23:16-22 · the profile of false prophets (Q8, compressible)
- Jeremiah 23:29 · fire and hammer (Q9, steelman Q7)

Old Testament Roots

- 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4 · the covenant promise to David, remembered as oath (leader background)
- Isaiah 11:1 · the shoot from the stump of Jesse
- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23 · the parallel shepherd oracle (Q10 background)
- Zechariah 3:8; 6:12 · the Branch as messianic title
- Genesis 1:3, 1:28 · creating word; fruitful and multiply (steelman Q7, Q2)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Luke 1:27, 32-33 · the throne of his father David (live discovery, Q5)
- John 10:11-15 · the Good Shepherd (live discovery, Q10)
- 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9 · the righteousness texts (steelman)
- 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 5:5 · washed, sanctified, justified; love poured in (steelman Q7)

Catechism

- CCC 1989, 1995 · justification sanctifies and renews (steelman, leader only)
- CCC 2009 · merits are God's gifts crowned
- CCC 754 · the Church as sheepfold, Christ the door
- CCC 436 · Christ the anointed: king, priest, prophet

Letters to the Exiles

Jeremiah 25 and 29 (with 28)

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover how to live faithfully in Babylon. They watch Jeremiah name the exile's true length, seventy years, against a popular prophet promising two; they read the letter that tells the deportees to build houses, plant gardens, and seek the shalom of the enemy's city; and they recover the real Jeremiah 29:11, a promise deeper and stronger than the coffee mug version, addressed to people most of whom would die before it came true. Exile, they learn, is not the suspension of vocation. It is its arena.

Catholic Touchstone. Christians are to contribute to the good of the society where God has placed them (CCC 2239), and the expectation of a new earth, far from diminishing our concern for this one, spurs it on (CCC 1049). We are citizens of heaven living as faithful residents of Babylon.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **Seventy years, stated twice.** In chapter 25, dated to the year Babylon's rise became undeniable, Jeremiah fixes the exile's span: "these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (25:11), after which Babylon itself will be judged (25:12). Chapter 29 repeats it to the deportees: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you" (29:10). Seventy years is a lifetime. The first hearers had to absorb that most of them would not come home.
- **The battle of timelines: chapter 28.** The prophet Hananiah publicly contradicts Jeremiah: within two years the exiles and the Temple vessels return (28:2-4). Two years versus seventy: one of these prophets is lying, and the popular one is Hananiah. Jeremiah's reply gives Israel a test: the prophet of peace is proven only "when the word of that prophet comes to pass" (28:9). Hananiah dies that year, as Jeremiah foretold (28:16-17). Give this as a compressed narrative; it sets up why the letter of chapter 29 was so unwelcome.
- **The letter.** Chapter 29 is an actual letter, carried by royal envoys to the first wave of deportees in Babylon (29:1-3). Its instructions are the opposite of everything the exiles wanted to hear: build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children, multiply, and "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile" (29:5-7). Not resistance, not assimilation, not despair: rooted, fruitful, praying presence.
- **Shalom for Babylon.** The word translated "welfare" in 29:7 is *shalom*: peace, wholeness, flourishing. God commands His people to seek the shalom of the empire that had conquered, plundered, and deported them, and to pray for it, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare." This is the Old Testament's closest approach to "love your enemies," and it is addressed to victims.

- **The mug verse in its envelope.** Jeremiah 29:11 may be the most quoted and least contextualized verse in modern Christianity. Read it in its envelope: addressed to exiles (29:4), after the command to settle in Babylon (29:5-7), after the seventy-year timeline (29:10), before the promise of seeking and finding (29:12-14). The promise is real and glorious. It is also corporate, long-range, and runs straight through exile rather than around it. The session's job is to give the group a bigger 29:11 than the one they came in with.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Build houses, plant gardens, be fruitful and multiply: many readers hear in the letter's commands an echo of Genesis, the creation mandate (Genesis 1:28) and Eden's planting (Genesis 2:8, 15), now sounding in enemy territory. Joseph modeled the vocation centuries earlier: exiled to a pagan empire, faithful under trial in it, a blessing to it (Genesis 39:5-12; 41:38-57). Daniel and his companions, carried off in an earlier deportation and already in Babylon when this letter arrived, lived it out at the imperial court (Daniel 1), serving Babylon's king without eating Babylon's defilement.

Fulfillment. The New Testament hands the letter to the Church. St. Peter addresses Christians as "exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Peter 1:1) and "aliens and exiles" whose good conduct among the Gentiles glorifies God (1 Peter 2:11-12): chapter 29 in apostolic form. Jesus prays not that the Father take His people out of the world but that He keep them in it, sent (John 17:15-18). Our commonwealth is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and precisely for that reason we can be the best citizens Babylon has. Your group will find the 1 Peter and Daniel texts themselves; the Daniel discovery is one of the best in the whole study.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

The Letter to Diognetus · *Anonymous, second century*

One of the earliest descriptions of Christians says they dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners: every foreign land is to them a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land. They share the common life, and transcend it. An early Christian work, commonly dated to the second century, it reads like a commentary on Jeremiah 29: rooted enough to bless the city, detached enough to belong to God.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *The City of God, Book XIX*

St. Augustine taught that the City of God, on pilgrimage through history, does not despise the earthly peace but makes use of it, and even contributes to it, while it awaits the peace that has no end. He cites the very counsel of this letter: the captives were told to pray for Babylon, because in its peace was their peace. The Christian serves two cities honestly by loving one of them supremely.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Loyola · *A summary formula of his spirituality, handed down by his companions*

St. Ignatius formed his companions to seek and find God in all things: not only in the chapel but in the classroom, the kitchen, the marketplace, the ordinary duties of the day. That is exile spirituality matured into mission. If God can be found in Babylon, then no posting, no job, no city, and no season of waiting is spiritually wasted time.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2239** · it is the duty of citizens to contribute, along with civil authority, to the good of society in truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom; love of country and service of it flow from gratitude.
- **CCC 1049** · far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectation of a new earth should spur us on: the body of the new human family growing here foreshadows the age to come.
- **CCC 2632** · Christian petition is centered on the desire and search for the Kingdom; and in intercession, the prayer of Christ's Body pleads for the needs of others, even of enemies (CCC 2635), which is how the exiles prayed for Babylon.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 • Build and Plant: MAJOR DEVELOPMENT. Look at 29:5 and 29:28: build houses, plant gardens. The two hope verbs of 1:10, the verbs of the sealed guesses, appear tonight as commands, handed to the exiles, activated in Babylon of all places. The demolition verbs have done their work; the building verbs have begun, quietly, in enemy territory, in ordinary life. If a participant catches it, and someone finally might, honor it warmly ("great eyes, hold that thought") and move on without one more word. Next session the seals are opened. Everything is in position.

Thread 2 • The Prophet Like Jeremiah. Quiet note for your pocket: chapter 25 hands the nations "the cup of the wine of wrath" from the LORD's hand (25:15). Remember who later prays about a cup, in a garden, and drinks it. Say nothing.

Thread 3 • The Watched Word. The word now works across generations and geography: a letter outlives its bearer, and the Daniel discovery (Q7) shows the word still working decades later in a reader Jeremiah never met, reckoning the seventy years from the books. The word travels farther than the prophet. Session 10 is next for this thread.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell the Hananiah confrontation and state Jeremiah's test of the prophet of peace.
2. Participants discover the letter's commands and can articulate the third way between resistance and assimilation: rooted, fruitful, praying presence.
3. Participants hear the personalized-promise reading of 29:11 at full strength and can give the contextual reading that makes the verse stronger, not weaker.

4. Participants find Daniel reading Jeremiah and 1 Peter addressing exiles, and can name their own Babylon.

5. Participants choose one concrete act of seeking their city's shalom this week, and one prayer of intercession for it.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer, memory verse, and the announcement: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress the chapter 25 material (Q1) to the leader summary and cut Question 9 (John 17). Never cut the 29:11 steelman or the Daniel discovery. And do not skip the closing announcement: tell the group to come next week without fail, because the sealed guesses come out. Say it with a smile and refuse all questions.

Letters to the Exiles

Jeremiah 25 and 29 (with 28)

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You have planted each of us in a time and a place we did not choose, among people who do not always share our hope. Teach us tonight how to live there: rooted without surrendering, faithful without retreating, seeking the peace of our city because we belong first to Yours. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Have you ever had to wait much longer for something than you were promised or expected: a diagnosis, a job, a relationship, a move? What did the waiting do to you?

W2. Where in your life do you most feel like a foreigner: a place where your faith makes you the odd one out? How do you usually handle it: fight it, hide it, or leave?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 25:8-12 ALOUD. (IF SHORT ON TIME, LEADER SUMMARIZES: IN THE YEAR BABYLON'S RISE BECAME UNDENIABLE, JEREMIAH FIXED THE EXILE'S LENGTH: SEVENTY YEARS, AND THEN BABYLON ITSELF WOULD ANSWER TO GOD.)

1. Two numbers matter in this prophecy: seventy years of servitude (25:11), and then judgment on Babylon itself (25:12). What do each of those numbers tell the exiles about God?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Seventy years tells them the exile is real, measured, and bounded: not a random catastrophe but a sentence with a term, under God's control from the first day. The judgment on Babylon tells them the instrument of discipline is not the new master of history: God wields empires and then holds them accountable (25:12). Both numbers preach the same sermon: even in the worst chapter, no one is holding the pen but God.

2. Leader, tell the Hananiah story from chapter 28 in two minutes: a rival prophet publicly promises the exile ends in two years; Jeremiah answers that the prophet of peace is proven only when his word comes true (28:9); Hananiah dies that year (28:16-17). Now the question: why would two years be the more dangerous message than seventy, even though it sounds kinder?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because a two-year exile requires nothing: no houses, no gardens, no roots, no engagement with Babylon, just bags packed by the door and life on hold. Seventy years demands everything: settle, build, raise children, bless the city. False hope is not merely wrong; it is paralyzing. It keeps people camped in the waiting room of a life God is asking them to actually live. Ask the group: where has a “two more years and this will all be over” story kept you from building anything?

READ JEREMIAH 29:1-7 ALOUD. THIS IS AN ACTUAL LETTER, CARRIED SIX HUNDRED MILES TO THE DEPORTEES.

3. List the commands of verses 5-6. What kind of activities are these, and what timeline do they assume? What two easier responses to exile do they rule out?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce; marry; have children; arrange marriages for those children; multiply, do not decrease (29:5-6). Ordinary, generational, rooted activities: you do not plant a garden for a two-year stay, and you do not plan your grandchildren’s weddings from a waiting room. The letter rules out both easy postures: resistance (life as sabotage and bitterness) and despair (life on indefinite hold). And notice the echo: be fruitful, multiply, plant. God reissues Eden’s mandate in Babylon. Exile does not suspend vocation; it relocates it.

4. Verse 7 goes further than anyone expected: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf.” The word is shalom: peace, flourishing. Remember who had just besieged Jerusalem, stripped the Temple, and marched them off to Babylon. What is God asking of these people, and what reason does He give?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He asks victims to seek and pray for the flourishing of their conquerors’ city, “for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (29:7). This is the Old Testament’s closest approach to “love your enemies,” and it comes with a startling piece of realism: God has bound His people’s good to the good of the pagan city around them. Christians do not flourish by their city’s ruin. Also notice the quiet theology in “where I have sent you”: Babylon thinks it deported them; God says I sent you. The exiles are secretly missionaries.

DIG DEEPER · CITIZENS OF TWO CITIES

The Church carries this letter in her pocket. It is the duty of Christians to contribute to the good of the society where God has placed them (CCC 2239), and the hope of a new earth, far from excusing us from this one, spurs our work in it (CCC 1049). We are not tourists in our cities and workplaces, and not their captives either. We are sent.

Steelman: Is Jeremiah 29:11 a Personal Promise to Me?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS WARMLY AS THE FRIEND WHO HAS IT FRAMED ON THEIR WALL

The case: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.’ This verse carried me through the hardest year of my life. God’s character does not change; if He had good plans for Israel, He has good plans for me. Scripture itself says everything written beforehand was written for our instruction and hope (Romans 15:4). All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16). Are you really going to tell people that the most hope-filled verse in the Old Testament is not for them? Context is important, but you can bury a living promise under so much context that no one can hear God speak through it anymore.” Present this with real warmth. Millions of sincere Christians hold it, it contains much truth, and mocking the coffee mug loses the room and deserves to.

5. First press, and be fair to both sides: read the envelope around the verse. Who is addressed in 29:4? What comes immediately before the promise in 29:10? What must the first hearers have realized about themselves and this promise?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Addressed: “all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (29:4).
Immediately before: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you” (29:10). Do the arithmetic the first hearers had to do: most adults reading this letter would be dead before the plans for welfare arrived. The promise was true, and it was corporate and long-range: God’s good plans for His people ran through a lifetime of exile, not around it. The verse was never a promise of a smooth individual road. It was something better: a promise that the hard road has a destination.

6. Second press, in the other direction: is the popular instinct entirely wrong? Read 29:12-14, the rest of the sentence. What in the promise really does reach across the centuries to every believer, and how does the Church read Israel’s promises?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (29:12-13). That is for everyone, everywhere, forever; Jesus repeats it almost verbatim: seek and you will find. And the Church does read Israel’s story as truly ours: written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4). So the honest resolution: our friend’s instinct is right, the verse truly instructs and steadies us; the mug’s timeline is wrong. What Christians may draw from it with certainty is confidence in God’s providence and His good purposes, not a personal guarantee of temporal welfare; and like the exiles’ hope, His purposes may run through Babylon, through seventy years, through a life that ends before the harvest. Deeper than the mug. Stronger, too: this version survives suffering instead of being refuted by it.

7. Live discovery. This letter had readers Jeremiah never met. Decades later, in Babylon, an old man is reading the prophet's words and doing the math. It is in Daniel 9, in the first few verses. Find what Daniel is reading and what he does next.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Daniel 9:2-3: "I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet... namely, seventy years," and he turns immediately to prayer and fasting. Savor what your group just found: a book of the Bible reading another book of the Bible. Daniel, already living in Babylon when this letter arrived, spends his life serving Babylon's court faithfully, exactly as the letter taught, and near the end he perceives "in the books" the seventy years God had spoken through Jeremiah and turns them into prayer. The word outlived its prophet, crossed an empire, and was still working in a reader decades later. And notice what the approaching deadline produces: not passivity, but prayer.

8. Live discovery. The New Testament addresses one of its letters to people it calls exiles, and tells them how to live among their pagan neighbors. It is at the start of 1 Peter, and again in chapter 2. Find both.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"To the exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Peter 1:1), and: "Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles... Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:11-12). St. Peter hands Jeremiah's letter to the Church. Christians are the new exiles: resident, contributing, visibly good for the city, and never fully at home. The strategy is unchanged in twenty-six centuries: build, plant, bless, pray, and let the neighbors notice.

9. (Cut if short on time.) The night before He died, Jesus prayed about His people's relationship to the world. Read John 17:15-18. What does He explicitly not ask for, and what does He ask instead?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one... As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15, 18). No evacuation; protection and sending. Jesus prays Jeremiah's letter over the Church: in Babylon, kept, and sent. Any spirituality built on escape from the world has to argue with the explicit prayer of Christ.

10. Bring it home. Name your Babylon honestly: the workplace, campus, industry, or city where you feel most like an exile. Applying tonight's letter, what does "build, plant, and seek its shalom" actually look like there, this month?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group do the work here; press past vague answers to concrete ones. Building and planting: doing your work excellently, making commitments, investing in the institution instead of merely

enduring it. Seeking shalom: solving a problem that is not your job, honoring the people no one honors, being the reason something flourishes. Praying for it: by name, regularly, especially for the people who make it feel like exile. The letter's scandal is its ordinariness: God's plan for His people in Babylon looked like houses, gardens, weddings, and prayer.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. What would change in your Monday if you crossed out “stuck here” and wrote what 29:7 writes: “sent here”?

S2. Is there a “Hananiah” message you have been preferring to God’s actual timeline: a two-year story that keeps you from planting anything?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Do one deliberate act of shalom-seeking in your Babylon this week: solve a problem that is not yours, honor someone unhonored, or improve something you could have just endured.
- Pray for your city, campus, or workplace by name every day this week, including one person there who makes it feel like exile.
- Write “sent, not stuck” somewhere you will see it on Monday morning, and read Jeremiah 29:12-13 before you walk in the door.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT

LEADER: SAY THIS AT THE VERY END, AND REFUSE ALL FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Next week, do not miss. Bring nothing but your Bible. The sealed guesses come out. That is all I am going to say.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, You have sent us where we are: to our cities, our jobs, our neighborhoods, our Babylons. Give us the long faithfulness of the exiles: to build and plant where we would rather pack and wait, to seek the shalom of places that do not love You yet, and to trust Your plans across timelines longer than our patience. We will call upon You, and You will hear us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 25 and 29 (with 28)

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 25:8-12 · seventy years; Babylon judged after (Q1, compressible)
- Jeremiah 28:1-17 · Hananiah's two years; the test; his death (Q2, leader narrative)
- Jeremiah 29:1-7 · the letter: build, plant, marry, seek shalom (Q3-Q4, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 29:10-14 · seventy years; the plans; seek and find (steelman Q5-Q6)

Old Testament Roots

- Genesis 1:28; 2:8, 15 · the creation mandate reissued in Babylon (Q3)
- Genesis 39:5-12; 41:38-57 · Joseph, faithful exile, blessing to the empire (leader background)
- Daniel 1 · faithful service at the pagan court (leader background)
- Daniel 9:2-3 · Daniel reads Jeremiah (live discovery, Q7)

New Testament Fulfillment

- 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11-12 · exiles of the Dispersion (live discovery, Q8)
- John 17:15-18 · kept in the world, sent into it (Q9, cuttable)
- Philippians 3:20 · our commonwealth in heaven (leader background)
- Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11 · how Israel's promises are ours (steelman Q6)

Catechism

- CCC 2239 · the citizen's duty to the good of society
- CCC 1049 · hope for the new earth spurs work on this one
- CCC 2632; 2635 · petition centered on the Kingdom; intercession even for enemies

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 30-31

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format • The seals open tonight

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. This is the session the whole study was built for. Participants watch the six verbs of Jeremiah 1:10 return in 31:28, carried by the watching verb of the almond branch; they open their sealed guesses from Session 1; and then they read the only passage in the entire Old Testament that contains the words “new covenant” (31:31-34). Finally they discover where that exact phrase appears next in the Bible: on the lips of Jesus, holding a cup, the night before He died. They will never hear the words of consecration the same way again.

Catholic Touchstone. The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful through faith in Christ, the law written on hearts that Jeremiah announced (CCC 1965-1966). Every Mass proclaims this chapter: the chalice of “the new and eternal covenant” is Jeremiah 31 fulfilled and made present.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The Book of Consolation.** Chapters 30-33 form the hope-core of Jeremiah, often called the Book of Consolation. After twenty-nine chapters dominated by plucking up and breaking down, the building verbs take over. It opens with a command that matters for Thread 3: “Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you” (30:2). Hope gets committed to writing, so it can outlive the crisis and the prophet.
- **The convergence verse: 31:28.** Read it slowly before the session and marvel at the craftsmanship: “And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD.” The six verbs of 1:10 return, and they are carried by the verb *shāqad*, to watch, the almond-branch verb of 1:12. Two promises from the call chapter converge in a single verse, thirty chapters later. This is not an accident of translation; it is the architecture of the book.
- **The phrase that appears once.** The words “new covenant” (*berit chadashah*) occur exactly once in the entire Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31. Every later biblical use of the phrase stands in this verse’s shadow: it is the decisive source behind all New Testament new-covenant language. Hold that fact until Q9; it makes the Last Supper discovery detonate.
- **What is new about it.** Four promises (31:33-34): the law placed within, written on hearts; “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”; all shall know Him, from least to greatest; and sins forgiven and remembered no more. The old covenant’s law was holy; its tragedy was location: written on stone, outside the will. The new covenant internalizes the law by the Spirit, and brings more besides: definitive forgiveness, and fulfillment beyond the old (the New Law fulfills and surpasses; CCC 1965-1968). The relocation to the heart is God’s answer to the promise of 3:22, “I will

heal your faithlessness,” and the deep ground of everything we said about infused righteousness in Session 6.

- **The guarantee written in the sky.** The oracle closes with a warranty (31:35-37): only if the fixed order of sun, moon, and stars departs will Israel cease to be God’s people. God posts creation itself as collateral. A quiet leader note here: the Church teaches that God has never revoked His gifts and call to Israel (cf. Romans 11:29); the new covenant is the old bride healed, not a replacement wife.
- **Tonight’s liturgy of the seals.** You are holding the sealed guesses from Session 1. The choreography is in the Discussion Guide, and the timing matters: the seals open after the group discovers 31:28, and before they read 31:31. The question opens, then the answer arrives. Do not improvise the order.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The covenant at Sinai was written “with the finger of God” on tables of stone (Exodus 31:18), and the tables were shattered at the golden calf before they reached the camp (Exodus 32:19): the covenant broken, physically, on arrival. Deuteronomy already knew where the law needed to go: “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart” (Deuteronomy 10:6). Ezekiel, in exile, hears the same surgery promised: “A new heart I will give you... I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone” (Ezekiel 36:26). The prophets agree on the diagnosis: the law was never the problem. The heart was.

Fulfillment. At Passover, in an upper room, Jesus takes the cup and speaks the phrase that had been waiting six centuries: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; compare 1 Corinthians 11:25). Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 entire, the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, and comments: “In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete” (Hebrews 8:13). Paul locates the writing: “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:3). Your group finds the Luke text themselves. Guard it until then.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *On the Spirit and the Letter*

St. Augustine made tonight’s passage a centerpiece of his treatise *On the Spirit and the Letter*. The law written on hearts, he argued, is nothing other than the grace of the Holy Spirit, poured into us so that we love what the law commands. His summary is one of the great sentences of Catholic theology: the law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled. The new covenant does not lower the standard. It supplies the power.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas · *Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 106, quoted at CCC 1966*

Asked what the New Law actually is, St. Thomas gave an answer that startles people who expect a rulebook: the New Law is chiefly the grace of the Holy Spirit itself, given to those who believe in

Christ. The written Gospel, the commandments, the sacramental forms, all of it serves and dispenses that interior gift. Jeremiah said it first: within them, on their hearts.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch · *Letter to the Ephesians*

Writing around the year 107 on his way to martyrdom, St. Ignatius called the Eucharist the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death. Take his words to tonight's text, as the Church's worship invites us to: the new covenant is not a document to consult but a cup to receive, the covenant in His blood offered at every altar, nourishing and healing the communicant and forgiving venial sin, while grave sin seeks the covenant's other word first, in Reconciliation. Where the earliest Christians guarded the Eucharist, we may say, Jeremiah 31 found its home.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1965-1966** · the New Law fulfills what Jeremiah announced: it is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ, working through charity, written on hearts.
- **CCC 1365** · the Eucharist is the sacrifice of the new covenant: the cup is "the new covenant in my blood," making Christ's one offering present.
- **CCC 64** · RELEASED FROM EMBARGO TONIGHT. Since Session 1 this paragraph has been leader-only. After the guesses are opened and 31:31-34 is read, read CCC 64 aloud to the group and tell them it has been waiting for them since the first night: through the prophets, God forms His people in the hope of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts.
- **CCC 86, 91-93** · the Magisterium serves the word of God rather than standing above it, and the whole body of the faithful, anointed by the Holy One, shares a supernatural sense of the faith. Background for the steelman chain; keep in the leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · TONIGHT TWO THREADS RESOLVE

Thread 1 · Build and Plant: RESOLVES TONIGHT. The verbs return in 31:28; the guesses open; the answer is read in 31:31-34. What God builds and plants is not a wall or a dynasty but a covenant, written in the one place no army can burn. Celebrate every guess: the near-misses prove they were reading well, and the wild ones prove the answer outran imagination. The "how" receives its first answer tonight in Luke 22:20, in my blood, and its full depth in Sessions 11 and 12.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. A breadcrumb lands in plain sight tonight: the new covenant is "in my blood." Covenants cost. Someone pays for this one. Do not develop it; Session 11 is close now.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word: MAJOR PAYOFF. The almond verb of 1:12, *shāqad*, I am watching over my word to perform it, returns in 31:28: I will watch over them to build and to plant. The watch held. Make sure Q4 lands this; it is the most elegant piece of craftsmanship in the book. One

test remains for this thread: the fire of Session 10.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants discover the return of the six verbs and the watching verb in 31:28, and connect both to chapter 1 themselves.
2. Participants open their sealed guesses and compare them, without grading, to 31:31-34.
3. Participants can name the four promises of the new covenant and explain its newness: the law internalized by the Spirit, joined to definitive forgiveness.
4. Participants hear the “no more teachers” objection at full strength and can answer it from the New Testament’s own practice and CCC 86.
5. Participants find Luke 22:20 themselves and can say in one sentence what happens at every consecration: Jeremiah 31, fulfilled and made present.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes. Build, including the opening of the seals: 60 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 13 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 3 (Rachel weeping) to a single leader sentence and cut Question 10 (the guarantee in the sky) to its final line. Nothing else is cuttable tonight. Protect the seals ceremony, the steelman, and the Luke 22 discovery with your life.

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 30-31

BEFORE ANYONE ARRIVES

LEADER PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Bring the sealed guesses from Session 1, all of them, visibly, in a basket or box placed where everyone can see it from the moment they walk in. Say nothing about it. Let it sit there through the opening prayer and the Win questions like a loaded question. If anyone asks, smile and say: soon.

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, You have loved us with an everlasting love. For seven weeks we have watched You pluck up and break down; tonight, let us see what You have been planning to build. Open Your word to us, open our sealed questions, and open our hearts, because that is where You have always wanted to write. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (12 MIN)

W1. Tell us about a promise someone kept after so long that you had stopped expecting it. What did the keeping of it change between you?

W2. When you resolve to change something about yourself and fail, where does it usually break down: not knowing what is right, or not being able to want it and do it? What would actually fix that?

Leader note: W2 is the whole session in embryo. Do not resolve it. Jeremiah 31:33 will.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (60 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 30:1-3 ALOUD.

1. After twenty-nine chapters dominated by demolition, listen to the change of key. What does God command in verse 2, and what does He promise in verse 3? Why write it in a book?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming... when I will restore the fortunes of my people" (30:2-3). The tone turns: chapters 30 to 33 are the Book of Consolation, the hope-core of Jeremiah. And the hope is committed to writing so it can outlive the crisis, travel where the prophet cannot, and be read by people not yet born. Words on a page are

hope in its most durable form. We are reading the proof.

READ JEREMIAH 31:3-6 ALOUD.

2. Verse 3 gives the motive under everything: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” Now hunt through verses 4 and 5. Two particular verbs appear that should make you sit up straight. Find them.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel... Again you shall plant vineyards” (31:4-5). Build and plant. Say nothing more yet; just confirm the group heard right, and note the doubling: I will build you, and you shall be built. God’s doing and Israel’s becoming, in one breath. The verbs are stirring. Keep reading.

3. (*Compress to one sentence if short on time.*) Read 31:15-17. Rachel, the long-dead mother of Israel, is heard weeping for her children. What does God say to her grief, and what does He never say?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“Keep your voice from weeping... there is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back” (31:16-17). He answers her grief with a future; He never says the grief was mistaken or excessive. Consolation in Scripture does not cancel lament (Session 5); it outlasts it. Leader note only: St. Matthew hears this verse again over Bethlehem’s murdered boys (Matthew 2:18), grief on the very road the Messiah entered by.

READ JEREMIAH 31:27-28 ALOUD, TWICE, SLOWLY. ASK THE GROUP TO HAVE CHAPTER 1 OPEN BESIDE IT.

4. Put 31:28 next to 1:10, and next to 1:11-12. Take your time. What has come back, and what is carrying it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Everything has come back. All six verbs of the call return, pluck up, break down, then the destructive pair in reversed order, overthrow, destroy, then build and plant (31:28; compare 1:10). And they are carried by the almond-branch verb: “as I have watched over them to pluck up... so I will watch over them to build and to plant.” To watch, *shāqad*, is the word of 1:12: “I am watching over my word to perform it.” Thirty chapters later, the watch has held. The demolition is ending; the building begins; and verse 27 says God will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and of beast: the land replanted with life itself. Two promises from the first night of this study converge in one verse. Let the group feel it before you move; some of them will already be looking at the basket.

The Opening of the Seals

LEADER INSTRUCTIONS: DO THIS NOW, EXACTLY IN THIS ORDER

1. Bring out the basket. Remind them of the question they answered seven weeks ago: Jeremiah's call ends with two verbs of hope, to build and to plant. What will God build and plant by the end of this book, and how?
2. Return each sealed guess to its writer. Let them open their own.
3. Invite volunteers to read their guesses aloud. Every guess gets honored: the near-misses prove they were reading the book well, and the wild ones will prove in about ninety seconds that the answer outran imagination. No grading, no teasing.
4. Then say: Jeremiah has been holding the answer since the day this book was written. It is four verses long, and it contains a phrase that appears nowhere else in the entire Old Testament. Turn to Jeremiah 31:31.
5. Have your best reader read 31:31-34 aloud, slowly, while everyone follows. Then silence for a few seconds. Do not fill it.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34 HAS JUST BEEN READ ALOUD. BEGIN THE INDUCTIVE WORK.

5. Verse 31 announces a new covenant, and verse 32 immediately tells us what it will not be like. What went wrong with the old one, according to the text itself? And catch the word God uses for Himself at the end of verse 32.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers... my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD" (31:32). The old covenant's failure was not in its content or its Author; it was broken from the human side. And the word husband hands us the whole study: the broken covenant of Session 2, the bride of the wilderness, the marriage that idolatry betrayed. The new covenant is not a new contract with new clients. It is the same Husband, healing the same marriage, this time from the inside.

6. Inventory verses 33-34: the new covenant makes four promises. List all four. Then the key question: the old law was written on stone. Where does the new one get written, and why does the location change everything? Think back to W2.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The four promises: the law put within, written on hearts; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people"; all shall know the LORD, from the least to the greatest; and "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (31:33-34). The relocation is the revolution, though not the whole gift: forgiveness and fulfillment come with it. Stone confronts you from outside: it can tell you what is right and condemn you for missing it, but it cannot make you want it, which is exactly where W2 said our resolutions die. Writing the law on the heart means God changes the want. This is the healing promised in 3:22, "I will heal your faithlessness," and it is why Session 6 mattered: grace does not just declare; it rewrites. The Catechism's name for the law written on

hearts is simply the grace of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1965-1966).

DIG DEEPER • A PARAGRAPH THAT HAS BEEN WAITING SEVEN WEEKS

Leader: read CCC 64 aloud now, and tell the group the truth: this paragraph has been sitting in your leader guide since Session 1 with strict orders not to be read until tonight. Through the prophets, God forms His people in the hope of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, and this time written on hearts. The Catechism was keeping your secret.

Steelman: Does the New Covenant Abolish Teachers?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL PROTESTANT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Read verse 34 again: ‘And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.’ And St. John: ‘you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything’ (1 John 2:27). Now, of course the new covenant has pastors and teachers; Christ appointed them, and every sound church ordains them. The objection is sharper than that: with the law written on every heart and the anointing teaching every believer, Scripture is sufficient, and no office after the apostles may bind the conscience infallibly. Ordinary, fallible teachers who serve the word, gladly. But an infallible Magisterium claiming binding authority to interpret God’s word for me is precisely the mediation Jeremiah 31:34 retired. Isn’t the Catholic teaching office a step back behind the new covenant’s own charter?” This is a serious argument from the text itself. Present it with full respect.

7. First press: our friend concedes Christ appointed teachers but denies any binding teaching authority after the apostles. Test that against the new covenant church’s own first doctrinal crisis. How was the circumcision dispute settled, by whom, with what formula, and with what force? Start in Acts 15, and check Acts 16:4 for how the decision traveled.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Inside the new covenant, with the Spirit poured out, a council of apostles and elders gathered, deliberated, and issued a decision with this staggering formula: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28), and the decision was delivered to the churches “for observance” (Acts 16:4): binding teaching, settling consciences on a disputed matter, after Pentecost. Jesus Himself had said “listen to the church” (Matthew 18:17), and Paul calls the church “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). And notice the gentle irony in our friend’s own proof text: 1 John 2:27 arrives inside a letter that is teaching its readers, correcting deceivers who denied Christ, and its author expects his apostolic word to bind: “Whoever knows God listens to us... By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). Read in context, the anointing means believers need no NEW gospel from the deceivers, not that apostolic authority ended. The new covenant, in its own first generation, taught with authority and expected to be obeyed.

8. Second press: so what does 31:34 really promise, and here is the surprise, how close is the Catholic teaching to our friend's instinct? What does the Church say the anointing of the whole people of God actually does, and whom does the Magisterium serve?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The promise is the democratization of knowing God: under the old covenant, the Spirit rested on prophets, priests, and kings; under the new, God pours out His Spirit “on all flesh”, on all kinds of people, not an elite (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17), and every baptized believer, least to greatest, knows God directly, personally, really. Now the surprise: the Church claims 1 John 2:27 for herself. The Catechism teaches that the whole body of the faithful, “anointed by the Holy One,” possesses a supernatural sense of the faith and cannot err in belief when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful,” it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals (CCC 91-93, citing John’s anointing verses). And the Magisterium “is not above the word of God, but serves it” (CCC 86, quoting *Dei Verbum*). The teaching office does not stand between God and the soul; it stands guard so that no counterfeit does. Our friend’s instinct, every believer truly knows God without an elite gatekeeping class, is not the objection to Catholicism. It is Catholic doctrine. The covenant is fully immediate at its consummation, when we see face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12); until then, the Shepherd shepherds through shepherds, exactly as He said He would in 23:4.

9. Live discovery. The summit of the study. The phrase “new covenant” occurs exactly once in the Old Testament: the verse we just read. Now find where it appears next in the Bible: who says it, holding what, on which night. Start in Luke 22.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). At Passover, the night before He died, Jesus reached for a phrase that had been spoken exactly once in salvation history and had waited six hundred years: Jeremiah’s phrase. He did not say “a new teaching” or “a new commandment” in that moment; He said THE new covenant, and He located it in a cup, in His blood. Then let the room in on what they already own: at every Mass, at every consecration, the priest says “the blood of the new and eternal covenant.” They have heard Jeremiah 31 proclaimed over a chalice every Sunday of their lives. Tonight they learned where it comes from, and what it answers: the guesses in their hands. What does God build and plant? A covenant written on hearts. How? In my blood.

DIG DEEPER · THE LONGEST QUOTATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Letter to the Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 in full (Hebrews 8:8-12), the longest quotation of the Old Testament anywhere in the New, and adds: “In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete” (8:13). And St. Paul tells the Corinthians they themselves are the delivery: a letter from Christ “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:3). When the apostles needed to explain what happened at the cross and what happens in the Church, this was the chapter they reached for.

10. *(Cut to the final line if short on time.)* Read 31:35-37. God closes the oracle with a warranty. What would have to happen for God's people to cease being His people? What has He posted as collateral?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The sun would have to stop shining, the moon and stars fail, the heavens be measured and the earth's foundations explored (31:35-37). God posts the fixed order of creation as collateral on the covenant. Every sunrise is a receipt. And note what the Church draws from this: God's gifts and call are irrevocable (Romans 11:29); the new covenant is the old bride healed, never a replacement. If the stars are still out tonight when you leave, the promise is still in force.

11. Last question, and let it be personal. "I will remember their sin no more" (31:34). Not merely forgive: refuse to remember. What does divine forgetting mean for the sin you carry, and where does a Catholic go to hear it spoken out loud?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It means the covenant God keeps no archive against you. "Remember no more" is covenant language, not divine amnesia: the all-knowing God chooses never to count the forgiven sin against you, never to bring it to the table again, never to treat it as an outstanding charge. And the new covenant delivers this audibly: in the Sacrament of Reconciliation you hear a human voice, lent to Christ, say "I absolve you." If anyone in the room has been carrying a sin God has already refused to remember, tonight is a good night to schedule the appointment where they can hear 31:34 spoken over them by name.

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (13 MIN)

S1. Look at your opened guess. What does the distance, or the closeness, between what you wrote and what God promised teach you about how He works?

S2. Where in your life are you still living on stone, knowing the right thing and grinding at it by willpower, in an area where the new covenant offers you a rewritten heart? What would it mean to ask for the writing instead of just the grades?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this Sunday, when you hear "the blood of the new and eternal covenant," answer silently: Jeremiah 31, fulfilled. Receive Communion as what it is: the covenant entering you, to write on your heart.
- Keep your opened guess. Tape it inside your Bible at Jeremiah 31 as a permanent reminder that God's answers outrun our best questions.
- Take one "stone tablet" area of your life, the resolution that keeps failing, and change the prayer this week from "help me try harder" to "write it on my heart." Pray it daily and watch what changes first: usually the wanting.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, You promised through Jeremiah what You delivered through Your Son: a covenant written not on stone but on hearts, sealed not with ink but with blood. Thank You for answering questions we sealed in envelopes with a promise You sealed in a chalice. Write Your law within us. Be our God; make us Your people. And let us never again hear the words of consecration without hearing Your prophet. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 30-31

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 30:1-3 · write it in a book; the key change (Q1)
- Jeremiah 31:3-6 · everlasting love; build and plant stir (Q2)
- Jeremiah 31:15-17 · Rachel weeping; hope for the future (Q3, compressible)
- Jeremiah 31:27-28 · the six verbs return; the watching verb (Q4, the convergence)
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 · the new covenant (Q5-Q8, Q11, memory verse)
- Jeremiah 31:35-37 · the guarantee in the sky (Q10, cuttable to final line)

Old Testament Roots

- Exodus 31:18; 32:19 · stone tablets, written and shattered
- Deuteronomy 30:6 · the circumcised heart
- Ezekiel 36:26 · the heart of stone removed
- Jeremiah 1:10, 1:11-12 · the verbs and the watch (open beside 31:28)
- Jeremiah 3:22 · I will heal your faithlessness (Q6 callback)
- Joel 2:28 · the Spirit on all flesh (steelman Q8)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Luke 22:20 · the cup, the phrase, the night (live discovery, Q9)
- 1 Corinthians 11:25 · the same words handed on
- Hebrews 8:8-13 · the longest OT quotation in the NT (Dig Deeper)
- 2 Corinthians 3:3 · tablets of human hearts (Dig Deeper)
- Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:11; 1 John 2:27; Acts 2:17 · steelman texts
- 1 Corinthians 13:12 · face to face, the consummation (steelman Q8)
- Romans 11:29 · the gifts and call irrevocable (Q10)

Catechism

- CCC 1965-1966 · the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit
- CCC 1365 · the Eucharist, sacrifice of the new covenant
- CCC 64 · released from embargo tonight; read aloud after Q6
- CCC 86, 91-93 · Magisterium serves the word; sensus fidei (steelman, leader only)

The Field at Anathoth

Jeremiah 32

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover what hope looks like when it acts: with Babylon's siege ramps against the walls and the prophet in custody, God tells Jeremiah to buy a field in occupied territory, and Jeremiah signs and seals the deed, has Baruch store it in a clay jar, and preaches one sentence over it: houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. They learn to pray Jeremiah's prayer of obedient bewilderment, they take the eternal-security question head-on from 32:40, and they find the purchase price of their own redemption.

Catholic Touchstone. Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom and trust Christ's promises, relying not on our own strength but on the grace of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1817). The Church rightly hopes for the grace of final perseverance (CCC 2016): confidence in God without presumption about ourselves.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The worst possible moment.** It is the tenth year of Zedekiah; Babylon's army is besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah is confined in the court of the guard for preaching that the city will fall (32:1-3). Real estate in Judah is at this moment the worst investment on earth. That is the moment God chooses.
- **The right of redemption.** Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel arrives with a legal claim: buy my field at Anathoth, "for the right of redemption by purchase is yours" (32:7-8). Under the Torah, land stayed in the family: a kinsman had the right and duty to redeem, to buy back, a relative's land (Leviticus 25:25), and later in the same chapter, a relative sold into servitude (Leviticus 25:47-55). The kinsman-redeemer, the *go'el*, is one of Scripture's richest figures: Boaz redeems Ruth by it, and Job cries "I know that my Redeemer lives." Keep the word redeem glowing; the New Testament will pick it up.
- **The transaction, in full legal detail.** Seventeen shekels of silver, weighed; the deed signed, sealed, and witnessed; a sealed copy and an open copy; both stored in an earthenware vessel "that they may last for a long time" (32:9-14). The tedium is the theology: hope files paperwork. Nobody notarizes a symbol.
- **Anathoth, of all places.** The field is in Jeremiah's hometown (Session 1), the town whose men plotted his death (11:21). God has him invest his savings in the soil of the place that rejected him, while the invader's army holds the countryside around besieged Jerusalem. And here is a reflection worth offering the group: there is something like forgiveness folded into this hope, money committed to a future shared with the town that plotted his death.

- **The honest prayer and the echo.** Jeremiah obeys first and then prays his confusion (32:16-25): You made heaven and earth, “nothing is too hard for thee” (32:17), and yet You told me to buy a field while the Chaldeans take the city (32:24-25). God’s answer opens by handing him his own words back: “Behold, I am the LORD... is anything too hard for me?” (32:27). Obedience may precede understanding; it never has to precede honesty.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The redemption law (Leviticus 25:25) and its most beautiful narrative, Ruth 4, where Boaz redeems land and gains a bride in one transaction at the town gate, with witnesses. Sign-acts that stake the prophet’s own life on the message run through the tradition: Isaiah’s years of walking stripped, Hosea’s marriage, Ezekiel’s brick. Jeremiah’s is the only one with a receipt.

Fulfillment. The vocabulary of this chapter becomes the vocabulary of the cross. St. Peter tells the Church exactly what its redemption cost, and in the currency of this chapter: “You know that you were ransomed... not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). And St. Paul, who knew about treasures stored in clay, writes: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Your group will find both.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage · *On Mortality*

Preaching while plague emptied Carthage, St. Cyprian in *On Mortality* urged Christians not to grieve as those who have no hope, for the dying depart to God’s promises. That is the vision this chapter enacts: the believer facing the same catastrophe as everyone else, steadied by what God has pledged beyond it. Buying a field during a siege is that faith with a deed attached.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas More · *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation, written in the Tower*

Imprisoned in the Tower, St. Thomas More wrote a whole book on comfort in tribulation, teaching that suffering borne with trust in God becomes the soil of consolation, and that the man who trusts God need not be robbed of his cheer by prison. He wrote it, like Jeremiah’s deed, from custody: a work composed for a future he would not see in this life.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux · *Her letters*

St. Thérèse wrote that it is confidence, and confidence alone, that should lead us to Love (Letter 197). Not confidence in our own strength, which fails on schedule, but audacious confidence in God’s. Seventeen shekels of silver, paid against all visible evidence, is confidence of exactly that kind.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1817** · hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying on the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- **CCC 1821** · we can hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love Him and do His will; in every circumstance we should hope, with grace, to persevere to the end.
- **CCC 2016** · the faithful rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance. Hope, not presumption: central to the steelman chain; keep in the leader guide.
- **CCC 162** · faith is a free gift that can be lost; to persevere in it we must nourish it. Steelman support; leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Thread 1 · Build and Plant (resolved, still bearing fruit). Tonight the resolved thread keeps paying: God extends the new covenant into an “everlasting covenant” (32:40) and says “I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul” (32:41). God planting with His whole heart: point it out with joy; the secrecy is over.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. A breadcrumb of vocabulary tonight: the kinsman-redeemer pays a price to buy back what belongs to the family. Q8 will land 1 Peter 1:18-19 openly; let the redemption language do its work without naming the thread. Resolution is next session. Build anticipation at the close: tell them next week we finally answer a question that has been hiding in this study since night one.

Thread 3 · The Watched Word. Quiet setup for Session 10: the deed is written, doubled, sealed, and stored in earthenware “that they may last for a long time” (32:14). A written word, preserved against catastrophe, guaranteeing the future. Next session, a king tries the opposite experiment on another document.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell the purchase and explain why its legal tedium is the point: hope files paperwork.
2. Participants discover the shape of Jeremiah's prayer: obedience first, honesty immediately after, and God's answer from his own words.
3. Participants hear the eternal-security case from 32:40 at full strength and can distinguish assurance in God's fidelity from presumption about our own.
4. Participants find the purchase price of their own redemption in 1 Peter 1:18-19.
5. Participants identify one “field” God is asking them to buy: one concrete investment in a future only faith can see.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 2 (the legal details) into the answer summary, and cut Question 9 (the earthen vessel) to its final sentence. Never cut the steelman or the 1 Peter discovery.

The Field at Anathoth

Jeremiah 32

OPENING PRAYER

"Ah Lord GOD! It is You who made the heavens and the earth by Your great power, and nothing is too hard for You. Teach us tonight to hope the way Your prophet hoped: with our hands, our signatures, and our savings, and not only with our feelings. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

(Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. What is the biggest thing you ever committed to before you could see how it would work out: a move, a marriage, a career change, a vocation? What did it cost you to sign?

W2. What is the difference between optimism and hope? Can you have one without the other?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 32:1-8 ALOUD.

1. Set the scene from verses 1-3: where is the Babylonian army, and where is Jeremiah, and why? Now verse 8: what deal does cousin Hanamel propose, and what does Jeremiah say convinced him it was from God?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The siege ramps are against Jerusalem's walls, and Jeremiah is locked in the court of the guard for preaching the city's fall (32:1-3). Hanamel offers him the family field at Anathoth under the redemption law (32:7-8), and Jeremiah says: "Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD", because God had told him in advance the cousin was coming. Notice the absurdity God is orchestrating: the worst real estate market in the history of Judah, a buyer in custody, a field behind enemy lines. Whatever this purchase is, it is not a financial strategy.

2. (Compress if short on time.) Walk through 32:9-14 and count the legal formalities: the weighing, the signatures, the witnesses, the copies, the storage jar. Why does the text bother? What is the difference between a gesture of hope and this?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Seventeen shekels weighed out; deed signed and sealed; witnesses; a sealed copy and an open copy; both archived in an earthenware jar “that they may last for a long time” (32:9-14). Nobody notarizes a symbol. The paperwork means the purchase is real: enforceable, inheritable, waiting. Hope in Scripture is not a mood; it is a recorded transaction against the future. The jar is the tell: you only preserve documents for a future you actually expect.

3. Verse 15 is the sermon over the deed, one sentence long. Read it aloud. Given everything burning outside the walls, what exactly is God promising, and what is He not promising?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land” (32:15). He is promising ordinary life will return: markets, deeds, harvests, the unglamorous machinery of a functioning future. He is not promising the city will be spared; the fall still comes. Hope in the biblical key is not the denial of the disaster but the purchase of what lies beyond it. And note where the field is: Anathoth, the hometown that plotted his death (11:21). Offer the group this reflection: a hope invested there carries something like forgiveness inside it.

READ JEREMIAH 32:16-17 AND 32:24-25 ALOUD.

4. Look at the order of events: Jeremiah signs first and prays second. And look at the content of the prayer: it opens in praise (32:17) and ends in bafflement (32:25). What does this prayer teach about the relationship between obedience, understanding, and honesty?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Obedience came before understanding: he bought the field, then told God he did not get it. And honesty came inside the praise: “nothing is too hard for thee... yet thou hast said to me, Buy the field, though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans” (32:17, 25). This is the mature form of Session 5’s lesson: you may obey without understanding, and you may say so out loud. God is not threatened by the gap between our compliance and our comprehension. He answers it: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?” (32:27), handing Jeremiah his own opening line back with a question mark.

READ JEREMIAH 32:37-41 ALOUD.

5. Verses 40-41 extend last week’s summit. What does God call the covenant now, what does He promise to put in their hearts, and, savor this one, with how much of Himself does God say He will do the planting?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

An “everlasting covenant”: the new covenant of 31:31, now with its duration named. He will put the fear of Him in their hearts “that they may not turn from me” (32:40): interior transformation again,

the law and now even reverence written inside. And then the most emotionally extravagant line in the book: “I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul” (32:41). The Shema commanded Israel to love God with all their heart and soul; here God vows His own whole heart and soul back. The planting verb from the first night, and God does it rejoicing.

Steelman: Does 32:40 Teach Once Saved, Always Saved?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL REFORMED FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Read the verse again: ‘I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me’ (32:40). Both directions are guaranteed by God: He will not turn from them, and He will see to it that they do not turn from Him. Jesus says the same: ‘I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand’ (John 10:28). ‘He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion’ (Philippians 1:6). If God Himself guarantees my perseverance, then the believer’s salvation is eternally secure, and the Catholic fear of ‘losing your salvation’ is a denial of the covenant’s own terms. Once His, always His.” This position gives real comfort to real people; present it with its full pastoral force.

6. First press, and be fair: a careful Reformed friend will distinguish the visible covenant community, whose members can fall away, from the elect, whom God preserves, and will say the Bible’s warnings are the very means God uses to keep them. Test that refined account against Scripture’s own warnings. To whom are they addressed, and in what tone? Think of Paul on himself.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Grant the distinction its due, and then watch it strain. The warnings are addressed to believers as believers, in the first person: Paul about Paul, “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27), and to the confident, “let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Hebrews warns people it describes in the richest covenant terms, enlightened, partakers of the Holy Spirit, sanctified by the blood of the covenant, against a falling away too concrete to be hypothetical (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Warnings can certainly be means of perseverance, Catholics agree, but a warning only works as a means if what it warns against is really possible for the one warned; a guardrail on a cliff no one could drive off would move no one. And on the visible-versus-elect distinction, notice its cost: it makes assurance unreachable in practice, since no one can verify from inside which group they are in. The entire book of Jeremiah, meanwhile, is covenant members, really God’s, really loved, walking away and reaping it.

7. Second press, and be generous: what does 32:40 really guarantee, and how close can a Catholic come to our friend’s comfort? Distinguish what God pledges about Himself from what He works in us, and name what the Church says we may confidently hope.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

What God pledges absolutely is His side: “I will not turn away from doing good to them.” No sin of yours can make God quit you; the covenant never lapses from His end, and no one can snatch you from His hand (John 10:28), which is precisely why the one danger left is not theft but walking. What He works in us, the fear of Him in the heart, is a real interior grace that makes perseverance possible and expected, not coerced; and how this corporate promise applies to each individual believer is exactly where the Church bids us hedge, because Scripture also shows hearts that resist (the flask of Session 4). So the Catholic keeps nearly all the comfort, on the Church’s own authority rather than this text alone: we “rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance” (CCC 2016), we live in confident assurance of God’s unbreakable fidelity, and we refuse only the presumption that our freedom has been retired, for the Church teaches that grace never coerces, and that a person remains able, tragically, to reject it (CCC 162, 1861). Assurance about God: total. Presumption about ourselves: the one thing hope declines. The field is bought; we are still asked to live on it.

8. Live discovery. Jeremiah redeemed the family field for seventeen shekels of silver. The New Testament tells us what our redemption cost, and it names the currencies it did not cost. It is in 1 Peter 1, verses 18-19. Find it and read it aloud.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The kinsman-redeemer law reaches its destination: we had a Kinsman with the right of redemption, He exercised it, and the price was not weighed out in silver. Jeremiah bought a field under the shadow of the invader as an act of hope; Christ bought us in enemy-held territory as an act of love. Keep the lamb of that verse in your pocket; it will matter enormously next week.

9. *(Cut to the final sentence if short on time.)* The deed went into an earthenware jar to survive the catastrophe (32:14). St. Paul uses the same image for something else stored in clay. Find 2 Corinthians 4:7. What is the treasure, what is the jar, and why does God prefer that packaging?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The treasure is the Gospel, the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ; the jars are us: fragile, ordinary, chipped. God’s habit is consistent from Anathoth to Corinth: He stores His guarantees of the future in clay, so that when they survive the catastrophe, everyone knows whose power did the preserving.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. What is your field at Anathoth: the concrete investment of money, time, commitment, or forgiveness that God is asking you to make in a future only faith can currently see?

S2. Jeremiah obeyed first and brought God his confusion second. Where are you currently waiting to understand before you obey, and what would signing first look like?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Name your field, then take one irreversible step toward buying it this week: the application submitted, the account opened, the apology delivered, the commitment made in front of witnesses. Hope files paperwork.
- Pray Jeremiah's prayer pattern once: begin with "Nothing is too hard for You," then tell God plainly the thing you have obeyed without understanding. Let 32:27 be His side of the conversation.
- Write "not with silver or gold" on a card and put it where you keep your money, as a one-week reminder of what you cost and what you are worth.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, nothing is too hard for You. You bought a future for Your people when every visible sign said the story was over, and in the fullness of time You paid for us in a currency beyond silver. Give us deeds-and-witnesses hope: hope that signs, seals, and invests. And where we obey without understanding, receive our honesty as prayer. Through Christ our Redeemer. Amen."

(Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Ah Lord GOD! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee." (Jeremiah 32:17, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 32

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 32:1-8 · siege, custody, Hanamel's offer (Q1)
- Jeremiah 32:9-14 · the transaction and the jar (Q2, compressible)
- Jeremiah 32:15 · the one-sentence sermon (Q3)
- Jeremiah 32:16-27 · the prayer of obedient bewilderment; God's echo (Q4)
- Jeremiah 32:37-41 · everlasting covenant; planting with all His heart (Q5, steelman)

Old Testament Roots

- Leviticus 25:25 · the kinsman-redeemer law
- Ruth 4:1-12 · redemption at the gate, with witnesses (leader background)
- Jeremiah 11:21 · Anathoth's plot (Q3 callback)

New Testament Fulfillment

- 1 Peter 1:18-19 · ransomed, not with silver or gold (live discovery, Q8)
- 2 Corinthians 4:7 · treasure in earthen vessels (Q9, cuttable)
- John 10:28; Philippians 1:6 · steelman texts
- 1 Corinthians 9:27; 10:12; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29 · the warning texts (steelman Q6)

Catechism

- CCC 1817, 1821 · the virtue of hope
- CCC 2016 · rightly hoping for final perseverance (steelman)
- CCC 162 · faith can be lost; nourish it (steelman, leader only)

The Scroll Burned and Rewritten

Jeremiah 36

90 minutes · Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants watch the word of God survive a direct, physical assault: a king slices Scripture apart with a penknife and feeds it to a fire, column by column, and the word comes back longer. Along the way they get the Bible's clearest window into its own production, prophet, secretary, dictation, rewriting, and they discover the two possible responses to the word: the father who tore his garments, and the son who tore the scroll. Thread 3, the watched word, resolves tonight.

Catholic Touchstone. God is the author of Scripture, and He inspired its human authors as true authors (CCC 105-106). Yet Christianity is not a religion of the book: it is the religion of the Word of God, not a written and mute word but the Word incarnate and living (CCC 108).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The Bible shows us its own workshop.** God commands: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you" (36:2). Jeremiah dictates; Baruch son of Neriah writes (36:4). This is the clearest scene of biblical composition in the Bible: revelation passing through a prophet's voice and a secretary's pen. It is a striking example of what the Church's doctrine of inspiration affirms, God the author, working through human authors who are true authors (CCC 105-106), though it is one mode of composition, not the model for every biblical book: God worked in and through each writer's own faculties and powers.
- **The stated purpose.** "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (36:3). This scroll exists to produce conversion. Turning is what this word was sent to do, and conversion remains central to everything Scripture is for.
- **The chain of transmission.** Watch how the word actually travels in this chapter: Jeremiah dictates to Baruch; Baruch reads aloud in the Temple; Micaiah hears and reports to the officials; the officials summon Baruch and hear it again; they report to the king; Jehudi reads it to the king (36:4-21). The written word moves on a relay of living voices, readers, and reporters. As in most of the ancient world, the many encountered the word by hearing it read aloud. File this for the steelman.
- **The penknife and the brazier.** It is winter; the king sits by the fire. As Jehudi reads three or four columns, Jehoiakim slices them off with a scribe's penknife and drops them in the brazier, until the entire scroll is consumed (36:22-23). Coolly, at leisure, in installments. Not rage: contempt.
- **The devastating contrast.** Verse 24: "Yet neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was afraid, nor did they rend their garments." The narrator chose those words to

detonate a memory: when Jehoiakim's own father, King Josiah, heard the newly found book of the law read, "he rent his clothes" (2 Kings 22:11) and led the greatest reform in Judah's history. The father tore his garments at the word; the son tore the word. Your group will find this contrast themselves in Q6.

- **The ending.** God's response: "Take another scroll, and write on it all the former words" (36:28), plus judgment on the king, and the quiet punchline of verse 32: "and many similar words were added to them." The word came back longer. You cannot edit God with a penknife; you can only enlarge the second edition.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The scene answers Josiah's scroll in 2 Kings 22: the same dynasty, one generation apart, hearing the same kind of document with opposite hearts. Behind both stands the claim of Isaiah: "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8), and Jeremiah's own almond branch: "I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12), with the word "like fire" (23:29), an image tonight's chapter will put to a literal test.

Fulfillment. Jesus stakes the same claim on His own words, a claim no mere creature could rightly make: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). St. Peter hands Isaiah's line to the baptized: "the word of the Lord abides for ever" (1 Peter 1:25). And history has run Jehoiakim's experiment at scale, Diocletian's edicts ordering the Scriptures burned, centuries of bans and bonfires, and the book in your group's hands tonight is the result of every attempt. The word has outlived every fire set under it, and every empire that lit one.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome · *Prologue to his Commentary on Isaiah, quoted at CCC 133*

The saint who opened this study closes its Scripture arc: ignorance of the Scriptures, St. Jerome insisted, is ignorance of Christ. The man gave his life to the sacred page, translating it in a cave in Bethlehem, because he believed the scroll Jehoiakim burned and God rewrote was worth every hour a human life could give it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ephrem the Syrian · *Commentary on the Diatessaron*

St. Ephrem, deacon and Doctor, compared the word of God to a spring: the thirsty drink and rejoice, but no one drinks the spring dry. What each reader carries away is enough for him, and what remains is inexhaustible for all who come after. A word like that survives fire the way a spring survives a torch.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Confessions, Book VIII*

St. Augustine's whole life turned on the scroll's stated purpose (36:3): that hearing, a man may turn. In a garden in Milan he heard a child chant "take and read," opened the Scriptures, read a few lines of St. Paul, and rose a different man. The word that survives its enemies also converts them; Augustine had been one.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 105-106** · God is the author of Sacred Scripture and inspired its human authors, who are true authors: the Jeremiah-and-Baruch scene in doctrinal form.
- **CCC 108** · the Christian faith is not a religion of the book but of the Word of God: not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living.
- **CCC 133** · the Church forcefully exhorts the faithful to frequent reading of Scripture, for ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.
- **CCC 80-82** · Scripture and Tradition flow from the same divine wellspring (CCC 80); the Church does not derive her certainty about revelation from Scripture alone (CCC 82). Background for the steelman chain; keep in the leader guide.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · THREAD 3 RESOLVES TONIGHT

Thread 3 · The Watched Word: RESOLVES TONIGHT. The claim of 1:12 goes through a literal fire and holds: the word is dictated, burned column by column, and rewritten with additions. The word is like fire (23:29), and fire is not what a brazier destroys. Q9 lands the resolution; make sure the group connects all three texts themselves: 1:12, 23:29, 36:32. Celebrate openly; this thread's secrecy ended when Session 8's did.

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah. For your pocket only, and next week it comes out of the pocket: a king destroys the word of God, and the word returns, enlarged, indestructible. There is another Word that men destroyed, who returned. Say nothing whatsoever tonight. Close the session by telling the group: next week, the question this study has been hiding since night one finally gets asked, by a crowd, to Jesus, and the answer has Jeremiah's name in it. Bring your Bibles.

Thread 1 · Build and Plant. Resolved and resting. If it comes up, enjoy it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell the chapter and describe the Bible's own picture of its composition: God, prophet, secretary, scroll.
2. Participants discover the Josiah-Jehoiakim contrast themselves and can name the two possible responses to the word.

3. Participants hear the sola scriptura case at full strength and can respond from the chapter's own chain of living transmission and CCC 81-82 and 108.
4. Participants resolve Thread 3 themselves: 1:12, 23:29, and 36:32 in one line of sight.
5. Participants examine their own penknife habits, the parts of God's word they quietly excise, and commit to reading Scripture daily this week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 15 minutes. Build: 55 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 15 minutes. Closing prayer, memory verse, and next-week announcement: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 2 (the transmission chain) into its answer summary and cut Question 8 (Matthew 24:35) to a single reading without discussion. Never cut the Josiah discovery, the steelman, or the Thread 3 resolution.

The Scroll Burned and Rewritten

Jeremiah 36

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, Your word is like fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Tonight, as we watch a king try to burn it, show us our own penknives: the pages we skip, the commands we trim, the words we would rather warm ourselves against than obey. Let Your word read us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

W1. Has a book, a letter, or even a single sentence ever actually changed the direction of your life? What was it, and why did it get through?

W2. Be honest: is there any part of the Bible you tend to skip, explain away, or quietly wish were not there? You do not have to name it out loud, but picture it.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 36:1-8 ALOUD.

1. Verses 2-4 show us something rare: the Bible describing its own production. Who speaks, who writes, and what does verse 3 say the scroll is for?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God speaks to Jeremiah; Jeremiah dictates "all the words of the LORD"; Baruch son of Neriah writes them on a scroll (36:2-4). And the stated purpose: "that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (36:3). The scene is a vivid instance of what the Church teaches about inspiration: God is the author, and the human writers are true authors, really writing (CCC 105-106), each in his own faculties and manner. And this scroll's stated purpose is not merely to inform but to turn, a purpose that remains central to all of Scripture. A Bible that has been read but has turned nothing in you has not yet finished the work it was sent to do in you.

2. (*Compress if short on time.*) Trace the word's journey from God's mouth to the king's ears through verses 4-21. Count the links in the chain. What carries the written word at every stage?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God to Jeremiah; Jeremiah's dictation to Baruch's pen; Baruch's voice reading in the Temple; Micaiah's ears and report; the officials summoning Baruch to hear it again; their report to the king; Jehudi's voice reading at court (36:4-21). Seven links at least, and every one of them is a living person: the written word travels on voices, readers, and witnesses. In this chapter, as through most of history, people received the word of God read aloud in assembly, which is how most Christians across the centuries have received it too. The word of God has never been a solitary text; it has always been a text carried by a community. Hold this thought; it returns shortly.

READ JEREMIAH 36:20-26 ALOUD. LET THE PENKNIFE SCENE LAND IN FULL.

3. Watch the king's technique in verse 23: not one dramatic gesture but columns, three or four at a time, sliced and burned as the reading proceeds. What does the method tell you about the heart? Is this rage?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It is worse than rage: it is contempt at leisure. Jehoiakim listens just long enough to cut, warming himself at a fire fed by the word of God, editing revelation with a scribe's own tool. Rage at least takes the word seriously. The penknife treats it as negotiable material. Ask the group to sit with the picture, because it is the honest portrait of selective religion: hearing in installments, keeping the fire comfortable, trimming as we go.

4. Verse 24 is the narrator's quiet verdict: no fear, no torn garments. Why torn garments? What would tearing your clothes at a reading signify, and who is conspicuously not doing it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Tearing garments was Israel's bodily grammar for grief and repentance before a devastating word. The narrator says the king and all his servants heard everything and felt nothing (36:24). Three officials did beg the king not to burn it (36:25), the faithful minority in every institution, but the room stayed comfortable. The scariest response to the word of God in this chapter is not the penknife. It is the composure.

5. Live discovery. The narrator wrote verse 24 to detonate a memory about this king's own father. One generation earlier, another scroll was read to another king of Judah. Find 2 Kings 22:11: who was the king, and what did he do when he heard the words?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"And when the king heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes" (2 Kings 22:11). The king was Josiah, Jehoiakim's father, and his torn garments launched the greatest reform in Judah's history. Same dynasty, same kind of scroll, one generation apart: the father tore his garments at the word; the son tore the word. Every hearer of Scripture can find themselves somewhere between those two kings at every reading, and the contrast searches us: even boredom, held long enough,

does a penknife's quiet work.

Steelman: Does This Chapter Prove Sola Scriptura?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS PERSUASIVELY AS A THOUGHTFUL PROTESTANT FRIEND WOULD

The case: “Look at what God does when His people apostatize: He commissions a scroll. And be precise about what we Protestants actually claim: not that the church has no teachers, councils, or creeds; we cherish them. Sola scriptura means Scripture is the only INFALLIBLE rule of faith. Pastors and councils carry real, God-given, ministerial authority, but fallible authority, always correctable by the word, the way the officials in this very chapter stood under the scroll rather than over it. Scripture is God-breathed and equips the man of God for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and God guards it Himself: no institution saved this scroll from the fire; God did, as He promised, ‘I am watching over my word to perform it.’ So when Rome claims an infallible Magisterium whose interpretations bind as surely as Scripture itself, that is the move we refuse: it sets a second, unfalsifiable rule beside the only one God authored. The lesson of Jeremiah 36 is that God’s word judges its handlers, every one. Scripture alone is the final court.” This is the strongest form of the argument, and much of it a Catholic can warmly affirm. Present it with full conviction.

6. First press: start with agreement, then test the “self-sufficient” claim against the chapter itself. Everything this argument says about the word’s inspiration and indestructibility, does the Catholic Church affirm it? And in the chapter, how does the self-sufficient word actually reach a single human being?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Affirm the agreements loudly: Scripture is God-breathed; its books “firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided” to them (CCC 107); it is indestructible and sovereignly protected: the Church stakes her life on all of it, and this study has been one long act of that reverence. Now the chapter’s own evidence: at no point does the scroll act alone. It reaches every hearer through the chain we traced in Q2: a prophet, a secretary, public reading in the Temple, faithful officials, living voices at every link. The word and its bearers arrive together; the chapter cannot show us one without the other. Even the scroll’s survival runs through a person: God’s protection took the form of Jeremiah and Baruch, hidden by God (36:26), dictating it all again. God watched over His word by means of a living, commissioned community. That is not an argument against Scripture’s supremacy; it is the Bible’s own picture of how supreme Scripture operates.

7. Second press: notice verse 32’s last clause: “and many similar words were added to them.” Who had the authority to add to the scroll of God’s word, and what does that tell us about how the canon we hold actually grew? Then let the Catechism say the surprising sentence.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The living prophetic ministry added to it: the second scroll is longer than the first, expanded under inspiration, at God's own command, through the same commissioned man and secretary. Jeremiah 36 shows inspired prophetic expansion under God's direction, not a church adding to Scripture on its own authority; the canon question is its own, separate argument, and history answers it the same direction: the books were written, gathered, tested, and recognized within the believing community across centuries, with no complete New Testament in the Church's first generations and no inspired table of contents dropped from heaven. Scripture and the Church's living Tradition "flow from the same divine wellspring" (CCC 80); the Magisterium, remember from Session 8, serves the word rather than ruling it (CCC 86). And then the Catechism's startling sentence, worth reading aloud: the Christian faith is not "a religion of the book" but of the Word of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living" (CCC 108). Our friend is right that God's word needs no merely human guardian. The Catholic addition is only this: the same God who guards the scroll also gave it a family to live in, and gave the family a Word who is more than a scroll.

READ JEREMIAH 36:27-32 ALOUD.

8. (*Read without discussion if short on time.*) Someone once claimed for His own words the indestructibility this chapter proves about God's. Find Matthew 24:35 and read it aloud. What is Jesus claiming about Himself by saying this?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Isaiah said the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8); Jesus says it about His own sentences. No prophet ever dared that; Jeremiah's words survived because GOD watched over them. Jesus puts His words in the category reserved for God's, which is either the most staggering blasphemy in history or a quiet disclosure of who has been speaking all along.

9. Thread resolution. Put three verses side by side and read them in order: Jeremiah 1:12, then 23:29, then 36:32. What promise was made, what was the word said to be, and what did tonight prove?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:12). "Is not my word like fire?" (23:29). "And many similar words were added to them" (36:32). The promise of the almond branch was made on night one of this study; tonight it went through a literal fire and came out longer. The word is like fire, and the flames in the brazier were the junior element in that transaction. Twenty-six centuries of penknives, braziers, edicts, and empires later, your group read the scroll tonight. The watch has never once failed.

10. Bring it home to W2. Jehoiakim's penknife worked in installments: a column here, a column there. What are the respectable, modern forms of the penknife, and which column is your own knife hovering over?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group generate them: the teachings we treat as optional because they cost us; the verses we historicize into harmlessness; the Sunday readings we sit through unafraid; the moral demands we trim to fit the life we already planned. Nobody burns a whole Bible anymore; we cut columns. The alternative is Josiah's posture: let the word tear something, and reform accordingly. The word will survive our editing either way; verse 32 guarantees it. The only open question is whether we will.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Between Josiah and Jehoiakim, torn garments and the penknife, where has your response to God's word actually been living lately?

S2. The scroll's purpose was "that every one may turn." What is the one turning your reading of Scripture has been politely avoiding?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Read Scripture every day this week, even five minutes, and read it Josiah-style: before you begin, pray one sentence: Lord, tear something.
- Identify your most-avoided column, the teaching or passage from W2, and read it slowly once this week, asking what obedience to it would cost and what it would give.
- Thank God once this week, explicitly, for the sheer existence of your Bible: dictated, burned, rewritten, copied, smuggled, translated, and watched over all the way to your shelf.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT

LEADER: SAY THIS AT THE VERY END, AND TAKE NO QUESTIONS

Next week: the question this study has been quietly hiding since the first night finally gets asked out loud, by a crowd, to Jesus Himself, and the answer has Jeremiah's name in it. Bring your Bible.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, Your word has outlived every fire set beneath it. Forgive our penknives: the columns we cut, the commands we trim, the composure we keep where our fathers tore their garments. Give us hearts that let Your word do its work: to burn, to break, to turn, and to forgive. And keep watching over Your word in us, to perform it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.'" (Jeremiah 1:12, RSV2CE · the promise this session proved)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 36

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 36:1-8 • dictation, Baruch, the scroll's purpose (Q1)
- Jeremiah 36:9-21 • the chain of transmission (Q2, compressible)
- Jeremiah 36:22-26 • the penknife and the brazier; the three who begged (Q3-Q4)
- Jeremiah 36:27-32 • the second scroll, longer (Q7, Q9)

Old Testament Roots

- 2 Kings 22:11 • Josiah tears his garments (live discovery, Q5)
- Isaiah 40:8 • the word stands forever (Q8 support)
- Jeremiah 1:12; 23:29 • the watch and the fire (Thread 3 resolution, Q9)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Matthew 24:35 • my words will not pass away (live find, Q8)
- 1 Peter 1:24-25 • the word of the Lord abides for ever (leader background)
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 • the steelman text

Catechism

- CCC 105-106 • inspiration: God the author, humans true authors
- CCC 108 • not a religion of the book
- CCC 133 • ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ
- CCC 81-82, 86 • Scripture and Tradition; the serving Magisterium (steelman, leader only)

The Man of Sorrows

Jeremiah 37-38

90 minutes · Win, Build, Send inductive format · Thread 2 resolves tonight

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Tonight the study's longest-hidden thread comes out of hiding. Participants walk Jeremiah's darkest road, arrest, beating, dungeon, and the mire of the cistern, and then assemble, with their own hands, the composite portrait this book has been painting for eleven weeks. Then they open Matthew 16 and discover that when Jesus asked "Who do men say that the Son of man is?", the answer reported to Him carried one writing prophet's name: Jeremiah. They finish by finding the differences that matter even more than the parallels: the type suffers and is lifted out; the Fulfillment goes all the way down, and through.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church reads the two Testaments as one divine plan, illuminated by typology: persons and events of the Old Covenant as real prefigurations of Christ (CCC 128-130). In St. Augustine's words, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New (CCC 129).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The last king's squirming.** Chapters 37-38 belong to Zedekiah's final years: a king who keeps summoning Jeremiah secretly ("Is there any word from the LORD?", 37:17), believes him enough to be terrified, and never once obeys. He fears the princes, fears the deserters (38:19), fears everyone except God quite enough. Zedekiah is the tragedy of the almost-persuaded.
- **Arrest and dungeon.** During a lull in the siege Jeremiah is seized at the Benjamin Gate on a false charge of deserting, beaten, and held "many days" in a cistern-house dungeon (37:11-16). The charge is false but plausible: he had, after all, preached surrender. Prophets get destroyed on plausible misreadings of their own words. Remember that when a later trial produces witnesses about destroying a temple.
- **The cistern.** Chapter 38: the princes demand his death, "for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers" (38:4), and Zedekiah hands him over with the most spineless sentence in the book: "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you" (38:5). They lower him by ropes into the cistern of Malchiah: "And there was no water in the cistern, but only mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire" (38:6). Remember Session 2: Jeremiah, the preacher of broken cisterns, is thrown into one to die. The people rejected the fountain and threw the messenger into a cistern; the geography of the whole book collapses into one pit.
- **The Gentile rescuer.** The one man who acts is Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, a foreigner in the king's house, who confronts the king and hauls the prophet up with ropes and old rags to pad his arms (38:7-13): mercy with logistics. God later exempts him from the catastrophe by name: "because you

have put your trust in me” (39:18). The first hands of rescue belong to a Gentile; file it under the nations streaming in.

- **The composite portrait.** Tonight’s central exercise (Q5) has the group assemble everything this study has gathered: known and consecrated before birth (1:5); a priest’s family from a village near Jerusalem; commanded to remain unmarried as a sign (16:2); weeping for the slain of his people (9:1); preaching against the Temple and nearly executed for it (7, 26); plotted against by his own hometown (11:21); “a gentle lamb led to the slaughter” whose enemies would “cut him off from the land of the living” (11:19); watched for his fall by familiar friends (20:10); handed a cup of wrath (25:15); tried before rulers, beaten, sunk in the pit. Let them build it before you name the destination.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The mire of the cistern has a psalm: “I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold” (Psalm 69:2, 14), and Psalm 69 becomes one of the Passion’s chief psalms: “zeal for thy house has consumed me” (John 2:17) and the vinegar for thirst (69:21). The pit as the place of the righteous sufferer runs through Psalm 88 and Joseph’s cistern (Genesis 37:24). And Jeremiah 11:19, the gentle lamb led to slaughter, cut off from the land of the living, stands beside Isaiah 53:7-8 as the Old Testament’s clearest sketch of the innocent one whose death is plotted.

Fulfillment. Matthew 16:13-14 is tonight’s destination, and the group must reach it themselves: the crowds, asked who the Son of man is, answer “Jeremiah or one of the prophets”, the only writing prophet they name. The full parallels unfold across the Gospels, some after that day at Caesarea Philippi: Jesus wept over the city (Luke 19:41), was rejected at Nazareth (Luke 4:28-29), confronted the Temple with Jeremiah’s own sentence (Matthew 21:13), was betrayed by a familiar friend, tried on garbled Temple-words (Matthew 26:61), and handed the cup (Matthew 26:39). Then the differences, which are the Gospel: Jeremiah lamented; Christ, often silent before His accusers, prayed for them. Jeremiah was lifted out of the pit alive; Christ went down into death itself, and came up on the third day with the pit’s keys.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Quoted at CCC 129*

St. Augustine gave the Church her golden rule for reading the two Testaments: the New lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New. Jeremiah’s life is that rule in flesh: a real man, really suffering, in whose true story the Church’s typological reading lets us see God sketching Another. Typology is not a trick of interpretation. It is the signature of a single Author across both Testaments.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Melito of Sardis · *On Pascha, second century*

One of the Church's earliest preachers, St. Melito taught that Christ was present in figure all through the old story: slain in Abel, bound in Isaac, sold in Joseph, persecuted in the prophets. The Old Testament, he preached, is a sketchbook of the Passion, drawn in the lives of real sufferers so that when the Suffering One came, His people might recognize the face.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) · *The Science of the Cross and her testament*

A Jewish philosopher who became a Carmelite, St. Teresa Benedicta taught in *The Science of the Cross* that the cross is truly known only from within, by sharing it with Christ; and in her testament she offered her life to God, an offering she completed at Auschwitz. The pattern of Jeremiah, the faithful one who suffers with and for a people who reject the message, did not end in the first century. It is the standing shape of prophetic love.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 128-130** · typology: the Church reads the unity of God's plan in both Testaments; the old prefigures what God accomplished in Christ, without emptying the old of its own value.
- **CCC 129** · St. Augustine's rule: the New hidden in the Old, the Old unveiled in the New.
- **CCC 601** · the Scriptures foretold the divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of the righteous one, the suffering Servant.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · THREAD 2 RESOLVES TONIGHT

Thread 2 · The Prophet Like Jeremiah: RESOLVES TONIGHT. Eleven weeks of breadcrumbs come home. The choreography of Q5-Q6 matters: the group assembles the composite portrait FIRST, from their own memory of this study, before anyone opens Matthew 16. When they then find the crowds answering "Jeremiah," the discovery belongs to them: they will have independently reproduced the first-century crowd's perception. Do not name Matthew 16 before Q6. If someone jumps ahead, grin and hold the room to the order.

Thread 1 and Thread 3. Resolved and resting. Next week gathers all three for the finale; tonight belongs entirely to Thread 2.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can retell chapters 37-38: the arrest, Zedekiah's secret consultations, the cistern, and Ebed-melech.
2. Participants assemble the composite portrait of Jeremiah from the whole study, unprompted by the destination.

3. Participants discover Matthew 16:14 themselves and can explain why first-century crowds saw Jeremiah in Jesus.
4. Participants hear the “typology is reading-back” objection at full strength and can answer it from Christ’s own hermeneutic and CCC 128-130.
5. Participants can name the differences that exceed the parallels: where the type was rescued, the Fulfillment descended, and rose.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes. Build: 60 minutes. Send and Live It This Week: 13 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 1 (Zedekiah) into its answer summary and trim Question 8 (Psalm 69) to the single verse comparison. Never cut the composite exercise, the Matthew 16 discovery, or the differences question; they are the entire architecture of the night.

The Man of Sorrows

Jeremiah 37-38

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, tonight we follow Your prophet into the pit. Give us eyes to see what You were painting in his sufferings, and hearts that recognize the Face when the portrait is finished. Through Christ our Lord, who descended lower than any cistern and rose. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (12 MIN)

W1. Have you ever recognized someone from a description, a sketch, or a resemblance before ever meeting them? What made the recognition click?

W2. What is the difference between admiring someone who suffered for the truth and being willing to resemble them? Where does the difference show up in real life?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (60 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 37:11-17 ALOUD.

1. (*Compress if short on time.*) Two portraits in these verses. First Jeremiah: what is he charged with, is it true, and what happens to him? Then Zedekiah: what does he ask in secret, and what does his secrecy tell you?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jeremiah is seized on a false but plausible charge, deserting to the enemy he had told others to surrender to, beaten, and imprisoned many days (37:13-16). Prophets are rarely destroyed by outright lies; they are destroyed by plausible misreadings of their own words. And Zedekiah: he smuggles the prophet in to ask, "Is there any word from the LORD?" (37:17), believing enough to ask, too afraid to obey. The secret consultation is its own diagnosis: a conscience that must hide its appointments with the truth has already chosen against it, and is negotiating the terms.

READ JEREMIAH 38:1-6 ALOUD, AND LET VERSE 6 LAND IN SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

2. The princes' charge in 38:4, the king's answer in 38:5, and the pit in 38:6: take each in turn. What is the charge, what is Zedekiah's sentence-of-surrender, and what are the physical details of where Jeremiah ends up?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The charge: “he is weakening the hands of the soldiers” (38:4), the perennial charge against prophets: bad for morale. The king’s surrender: “Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you” (38:5), authority washing its hands of an innocent man to appease a mob; remember that posture, you will see it again on a Friday morning. And the pit: lowered by ropes into the cistern of Malchiah, no water, only mire, “and Jeremiah sank in the mire” (38:6). Left to die slowly, in the dark, in the mud, without anyone having to strike the blow.

- 3.** Think back to Session 2 and the sermon this whole book started with. What did Jeremiah preach that Israel had exchanged the fountain for? Now look where they put him. What has the geography of the book just done?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They forsook the fountain of living waters and hewed out broken cisterns (2:13), and now they have thrown the man who said so into a broken cistern to die in it. The book’s geography collapses into a single image: the people’s spiritual choice becomes the prophet’s literal address. Reject the fountain long enough and you will end up disposing of the messenger in the very cistern he warned you about. Sin always finds it easier to bury the diagnosis than drink the cure.

READ JEREMIAH 38:7-13 ALOUD.

- 4.** One man in the entire government acts. Who is he, where is he from, and savor the details of how he does the rescue. Then check Jeremiah 39:15-18: what does God later say about him, and why?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, a Gentile serving in the king’s house, confronts the king publicly and leads the rescue with thirty men at his back (38:10): ropes, and old rags and worn-out clothes to pad the prophet’s armpits so the ropes will not tear him (38:11-12). Mercy with logistics: compassion that thinks about armpits. And God exempts him by name from the coming catastrophe, “because you have put your trust in me” (39:18). The first rescuing hands in this story are foreign hands. When the covenant insiders wanted the prophet dead, an outsider believed. The nations are already leaning into this story.

The Composite Portrait

- 5. The exercise this study has been waiting for.** As a group, from memory and your notes across all eleven weeks, build the full portrait of this man. Leader: write the list where all can see, prompting with the references below only as needed, and add tonight’s chapters last. Do not say where this is going.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The portrait, assembled: known and consecrated before birth (1:5); a priest's family, from a small town near Jerusalem; commanded to remain unmarried as a living sign (16:2); the prophet who wept for the slain of his people, "O that my head were waters" (9:1); who preached against the Temple in its own gate and was nearly executed for it (7; 26); whose own hometown plotted his death (11:21); who called himself "a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" whose enemies schemed to "cut him off from the land of the living" (11:19); watched for his fall by familiar friends (20:10); the bearer of the cup of God's wrath (25:15); tried before rulers, beaten by the Temple establishment, handed over by a governor-king who found no way to resist the mob, and lowered into the pit to die (20; 26; 37-38). When the list is complete, ask the room, and then go straight to Q6: does this portrait remind you of anyone?

6. Live discovery. The resolution. You were not the first to see it. Standing at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples what the crowds were saying about Him. Find Matthew 16:13-14 and read the crowd's answer aloud, every name.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Jeremiah: the only writing prophet the crowds name. And mark when this was said: at Caesarea Philippi, mid-ministry, before the Passion, before the Temple confrontation, before the fullest parallels had even happened. Already the shape people saw in Jesus, the sorrowful prophet of judgment, unmarried, opposed by the establishment, was legible enough that they reached for this name before all the scroll-writers of Israel. Your group just reproduced that perception, independently, from the text, eleven weeks in the making. This is the question the study has been hiding since night one: why did people look at Jesus and see Jeremiah? Now they know: because, as the Church's typological reading lets us see, God had prepared in a prophet's whole life the sketch of Another.

Steelman: Is Typology Just Reading Christ Back Into the Text?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT THIS AS A SHARP SKEPTICAL FRIEND WOULD

The case: "Impressive list. But humans are pattern-matching machines: give me any two tragic biographies and enough motivation and I will find you a dozen parallels. Jeremiah is about Jeremiah, a sixth-century prophet with a sixth-century message; the 'portrait of Christ' is Christian hindsight projected backward. The New Testament writers ransacked the Old for proof-texts, ripping verses from context. Respectable reading takes each text on its own terms and in its own century. Typology is eisegesis with incense." This objection lives inside many modern Catholics too. Present it at full strength.

7. First press: whose method is typology, originally? Who taught the Church to read this way, and what happened on the Emmaus road? And what does tonight's own discovery, Matthew 16:14, do to the "hindsight projection" theory?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The method is Christ's own: "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27); "if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:46); Jonah's three days as the sign of His own (Matthew 12:39-40). Reject typology and your quarrel is with the Teacher, not the students. And Matthew 16:14 is an early canonical datum that makes the hindsight-only theory hard to sustain: within the Gospel's own record, people saw Jeremiah in Jesus before the crucifixion, before any Christian had a motive to construct parallels. The report reaches us through an evangelist, so it cannot settle every historical question by itself; what it shows is that the resemblance was intelligible in real time, without Christian hindsight. Typology did not invent the pattern; it noticed it.

8. Second press: what makes typology more than coincidence-hunting? What does the Church actually claim about how the two Testaments relate, and what unique thing can God do that human authors cannot? For evidence, put Jeremiah in the mire (38:6) next to Psalm 69:2 and 69:21, and next to a detail from the cross.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Human authors write with words; God also writes with events, because He is the author of history itself. That is the Church's claim: the unity of the divine plan across both Testaments, in which persons and events really prefigure what God accomplishes in Christ, without losing their own historical reality (CCC 128-130); the New hidden in the Old, the Old unveiled in the New (CCC 129); the Scriptures foretold the plan of the suffering Righteous One (CCC 601). The evidence has texture: Jeremiah literally "sank in the mire" (38:6); Psalm 69 prays "I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold" (69:2), and that same psalm supplies the Passion its details, the zeal for God's house (John 2:17) and the vinegar for His thirst (Psalm 69:21). One psalm, one prophet's pit, one cross: three registers of a single Author's handwriting. Discipline is required, and the Church supplies it: types are confirmed by Scripture and the Church's reading, not by private ingenuity. But the phenomenon itself is as real as the crowds' answer at Caesarea Philippi.

9. Now the question that matters more than every parallel: the differences. Where the portrait and the Person diverge, the Gospel begins. Compare how Jeremiah responded to his persecutors (Session 5) with how Christ responded to His. And compare how each man's pit-story ends.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jeremiah lamented, accused God, called down judgment on his enemies, and cursed his own birthday, and all of that was honest prayer. Christ, who had more right to all of it, was often silent before His accusers, and prayed, "Father, forgive them." Jeremiah was hauled out of the cistern by ropes and rags, rescued alive from the edge of death. Christ was not rescued: He went all the way down, into death itself, the pit no ropes reach, and on the third day came up carrying its keys. The type is a sketch; sketches are outlines with the middle left empty. Jeremiah shows us the shape of the Suffering One. Only Christ fills it, exceeds it, and comes out the other side with the power to pull the rest of us up. The rags-and-ropes rescue of chapter 38 is a lovely mercy; the Resurrection is a

new creation.

10. Last one, and make it personal. St. Paul says we were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, which means the pattern is now the family shape. Where in your life right now are you in the cistern, sinking, waiting? What does tonight's chapter, and its Fulfillment, promise you there?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group speak; do not rush. The promises on the table tonight: the pit is seen (God's eye never left Jeremiah in the mire); rescue comes, sometimes through unexpected, foreign, unofficial hands, so stay alert for your Ebed-melech and be willing to be someone else's; and above all, the One we follow has been lower than any pit we will ever see, and owns the exit. "He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog" (Psalm 40:2) is now a family psalm. No cistern gets the last word in this story anymore.

SEND • CLOSING QUESTIONS (13 MIN)

S1. Now that you have seen the portrait and the Face, how does it change the way you will read the Old Testament from here on?

S2. Ebed-melech brought ropes and old rags: compassion with logistics. Who is in a cistern within your reach this week, and what are your ropes and rags?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Be someone's Ebed-melech this week: identify one person sinking, and do one concrete, logistical act of rescue: the ride, the meal, the call, the errand. Padding for the ropes counts.
- Pray Psalm 69 once this week, slowly, hearing it in three voices: Jeremiah's, Christ's, and your own.
- Reread Jeremiah 11:19 and Isaiah 53:7 side by side one evening, and end with a simple prayer of thanks to the Lamb who was not rescued so that you would be.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, the crowds looked at You and saw Jeremiah, and tonight we finally see why. You wept his tears, bore his charges, drank his cup, and went down into a pit deeper than his, and You came up. Be with everyone here who is sinking. Send Your ropes and rags through us. And teach us to read all the Scriptures the way You taught at Emmaus: finding You. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes." (Jeremiah 11:19, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 37-38

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 37:11-17 · arrest, beating, dungeon; Zedekiah's secret question (Q1)
- Jeremiah 38:1-6 · the charge, the surrender, the cistern, the mire (Q2-Q3)
- Jeremiah 38:7-13 · Ebed-melech, ropes and rags (Q4)
- Jeremiah 39:15-18 · the Gentile's reward (Q4)

The Composite Portrait (Q5)

- Jeremiah 1:5 · known before birth (Session 1)
- Jeremiah 16:2 · commanded celibacy as sign
- Jeremiah 9:1 · weeping over the people
- Jeremiah 7; 26 · Temple sermon and trial (Session 3)
- Jeremiah 11:19, 21 · the gentle lamb; the hometown plot (memory verse)
- Jeremiah 20:10 · familiar friends watching (Session 5)
- Jeremiah 25:15 · the cup (Session 7)

New Testament Fulfillment

- Matthew 16:13-14 · THE RESOLUTION (live discovery, Q6)
- Luke 19:41; Luke 4:28-29; Matthew 21:13; 26:39, 61 · the parallels the crowds saw
- Luke 24:27; John 5:46; Matthew 12:39-40 · Christ's own typology (steelman Q7)
- Psalm 69:2, 21; John 2:17; Psalm 40:2 · the mire psalms (Q8, Q10)
- Isaiah 53:7-8 · beside Jeremiah 11:19 (Live It)

Catechism

- CCC 128-130 · typology and the unity of the Testaments
- CCC 129 · Augustine's rule
- CCC 601 · the suffering Servant foretold

Hope Beyond the Ruins

Jeremiah 39, 52 and Lamentations 3

90 minutes · Win, Build, Send inductive format · Final session

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The city falls, and the study lands. Participants walk through the catastrophe Jeremiah spent forty years announcing, watch the prophet refuse comfort in Babylon to stay with the poorest of his people, and then discover the strangest ending in prophetic literature: the book closes not with the fall but with a son of David released from prison and seated at a king's table, and that released prisoner's name appears in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. They pray Lamentations 3 from the middle of the rubble, take the "was Jeremiah a failure?" question head-on, and gather all three threads of the study into one final retrospective.

Catholic Touchstone. We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of history, even when His ways are hidden in ruins; only at the end will we fully know the paths by which He guided all things to their goal (cf. CCC 313-314). His mercies are new every morning, including the mornings after everything falls.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The fall, told twice.** Chapter 39 narrates it plainly: the wall breached, Zedekiah caught fleeing, his sons slaughtered before his eyes as the last thing he ever sees before being blinded and chained for Babylon (39:1-7). Chapter 52, the book's appendix, retells it with the Temple's burning and the inventory of its looted vessels. Forty years of warnings, exactly fulfilled. Do not rush this; the study's hope is honest only if the catastrophe is.
- **The prophet's choice.** Babylon frees Jeremiah with honors and an open invitation: come to Babylon, be looked after well (40:1-4). The man who preached submission to Babylon for decades refuses the comfortable version of his own advice and stays "among the people who were left in the land" (40:6): the impoverished remnant under Gedaliah's fragile, Babylonian-appointed administration. His last free choice is solidarity.
- **The bitter coda.** Gedaliah the governor is assassinated (41); the panicked remnant flees to Egypt against God's explicit word, dragging Jeremiah with them (42-43). Scripture's last sight of the prophet is in the land of the original slavery, still preaching, still ignored. An ancient tradition, not found in Scripture, holds that his own people stoned him there. Handle it honestly as tradition, and let its plausibility sting.
- **Baruch's little oracle.** Chapter 45 preserves a single-page word for the faithful secretary: "Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not... but I will give you your life as a prize of war" (45:5). For everyone who serves faithfully in a collapsing situation, God's word to Baruch is the realistic promise: not greatness, but your life, kept, as spoil carried out of the wreck.

- **The strangest ending in the prophets.** The book's final four verses (52:31-34) leap forward to the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's exile, decades after the fall: Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah, is released from prison by a new Babylonian king, spoken kindly to, given a seat above the other kings, and "dined regularly at the king's table" every day of his life. That is how the book ends: a son of David, alive, out of prison, at table. The canonical last word of Jeremiah is a whisper of Davidic hope. Q6 sends the group to find where that whisper leads, and it is the finale of the whole study.
- **Lamentations.** Tradition ascribes Lamentations to Jeremiah, weeping through the ruins; the Church has always placed the two together, whatever the details of authorship. Its center of gravity, 3:21-24, is faith's most-quoted sentence from inside a disaster: steadfast love that never ceases, mercies new every morning, great faithfulness, said while the smoke is still rising.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The fall of Jerusalem is the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28 executed, and the seventy years of Session 7 beginning. Jehoiachin's release is the ember of God's throne promise to David (2 Samuel 7), the lamp kept burning for David's sake (1 Kings 11:36), guttering but never out, exactly as 33:17 promised: "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel."

Fulfillment. Open the New Testament to its first page. The genealogy of Jesus Christ pivots on the deportation to Babylon, and there, on the far side of the catastrophe, stands the released prisoner of Jeremiah 52: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel" (Matthew 1:12); Jechoniah is Jehoiachin. The man dining at the king's table in the book's last verses is an ancestor of Jesus Christ. The ember the book ends on becomes the Light of the world. Your group finds this themselves in Q6, and it is the last discovery of the study: the Bible's first page answers Jeremiah's last one.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *His dying words, as recorded in Palladius's Dialogue*

The great preacher of Constantinople died like Jeremiah: exiled by the powerful for telling them the truth, marched to death in a place not his own. Palladius records his dying words: Glory to God for all things. Not for some things, not for the pleasant things: for all things, said from inside the ruin. It is Lamentations 3 with a Greek accent, and it is the destination of everything this study has practiced.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales · *His counsel in his letters of spiritual direction*

St. Francis de Sales counseled the anxious not to fear what may happen tomorrow: the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will care for you then; either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. The exiles learned it across seventy years. His mercies do not carry over from yesterday; they are minted new every morning, in exactly the

day's denomination.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II · *Inaugural homily, 1978*

A pope from a nation that had been erased from the map more than once opened his pontificate with the sentence he never stopped repeating: Be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ. He had watched empires burn cities and had outlived the empires. It is the send-off this study hands you: people formed by Jeremiah do not need the world to be safe in order to be sent into it.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 313** · the saints' unbroken confidence that all things work for good for those who love God: the witness of St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas More on the eve of martyrdom, and Julian of Norwich.
- **CCC 314** · we firmly believe God is master of the world and of history, though His ways are often unknown to us until we see Him face to face.
- **CCC 1821** · in every circumstance we hope, with the grace of God, to persevere to the end and obtain the joy of heaven.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · FINAL SESSION · ALL THREADS GATHERED OPENLY TONIGHT

The Retrospective (Q9) is the study's capstone. All secrecy is over; tonight the group names the architecture out loud. Thread 1: planted in the six verbs of 1:10, sealed in envelopes, developed through the conditional verbs of 18:7-10 and the exiles' commands of 29:5, resolved at 31:28-34 and the cup of Luke 22:20. Thread 2: planted at 1:5 and 1:19, breadcrumb through the stocks, the trial, the lamb of 11:19, the cup of 25:15, resolved at Matthew 16:14 and completed in the differences: He was not rescued; He rose. Thread 3: planted at 1:12 with the almond branch, claimed as fire and hammer at 23:29, tested by the penknife and brazier, resolved at 36:32, and sealed by Matthew 24:35. Let the group reconstruct as much as possible themselves; supply only what they miss. Then land the final connection: tonight's Jechoniah discovery shows all three threads flowing into one genealogy, one Person, one table.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can narrate the fall honestly and identify Jeremiah's final choice of solidarity with the poor of the land.
2. Participants discover the book's strange ending and find Jechoniah in the genealogy of Christ themselves.
3. Participants can pray Lamentations 3:21-24 as hope-from-inside-ruins rather than optimism-before-them.

4. Participants hear the “Jeremiah failed” case at full strength and can answer it with the twenty-six-century harvest.
5. Participants reconstruct all three threads of the study and leave with a personal rule of life drawn from the whole book.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes. Build: 58 minutes, including the retrospective. Send and Live It: 15 minutes. Closing prayer and memory verse: 5 minutes.

If you are running long: compress Question 3 (Egypt and Baruch) into its answer summary. Never cut the Jechoniah discovery, the failure steelman, or the retrospective; they are the landing gear of the entire study.

Hope Beyond the Ruins

Jeremiah 39, 52 and Lamentations 3

OPENING PRAYER

"Father, tonight the city falls, and we do not look away. You were master of the story on the day the walls broke, and You are master of ours. Walk us through the ruins to the ember You kept burning, and send us out with hope that has been through the fire. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Opening Prayer)

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (12 MIN)

W1. Twelve weeks ago you walked into this study. What is one thing that has actually changed: in how you read, how you pray, or how you see God?

W2. Have you ever watched something end, a job, a community, a chapter of life, and only much later seen what God was preserving through the ending? What was the ember?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (58 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 39:1-10 ALOUD, UNHURRIED. THIS IS THE EVENT THE WHOLE BOOK ANNOUNCED.

1. Forty years of warnings land in ten verses. What happens to the city, to Zedekiah, and to the poorest of the people (39:10)? And a hard question: was any of this a surprise?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The wall is breached; Zedekiah flees by night and is caught; his sons are slaughtered as the last thing he ever sees before he is blinded and chained for Babylon (39:1-7); the city burns. And in a strange mercy, the poorest, who owned nothing, are given vineyards and fields (39:10): an unexpected reversal in which the poor receive the land, and one can already hear the grammar of the Beatitude in it. None of it was a surprise; every clause had been preached for roughly four decades. Judgment in Scripture is never an ambush. It is the expiration of ignored mercy, arriving as foretold, still grieving.

READ JEREMIAH 40:1-6 ALOUD.

2. Babylon offers Jeremiah the comfortable version of his own preaching: come to Babylon, be cared for, verse 4. He had told everyone to submit to Babylon. What does he choose instead, and what does the choice reveal?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He stays “among the people who were left in the land” (40:6): the impoverished remnant under Gedaliah’s fragile administration. The man who preached submission to Babylon refuses a pension in Babylon. His counsel had never been about comfort; it was about obedience, and his last free act is solidarity with the people who had rejected him for forty years. His staying is a sermon without words. Love that stays with the ruins it warned about is the most credible love there is.

3. (*Compress if short on time.*) Leader, narrate the bitter coda in two minutes: Gedaliah assassinated (41); the remnant flees to Egypt against God’s explicit word, dragging Jeremiah along (42-43); an ancient tradition, not in Scripture, says his own people stoned him there. Then read Jeremiah 45:5, the one-page oracle for Baruch. What does God promise His faithful secretary, and what does He pointedly not promise?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not... but I will give you your life as a prize of war” (45:5). Not greatness, not success, not rescue from the collapse: your life, kept, carried out of the wreck like spoil. It is the realistic promise for everyone who serves faithfully inside a failing situation, and it is enough. Baruch got no monument; he got his life, and, unknown to him, his handwriting became Scripture. God’s rewards routinely outrun what He promises, on timelines that outrun the servant.

READ LAMENTATIONS 3:19-24 ALOUD, SLOWLY. TRADITION HEARS JEREMIAH’S OWN VOICE HERE, IN THE RUBBLE.

4. Watch the pivot. Verses 19-20 are wormwood and gall, a soul bowed down. Then verse 21: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.” What does the sufferer DO to get from despair to hope, and what exactly does he call to mind?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He performs an act of deliberate memory: “This I call to mind.” Hope here is not a feeling that arrives; it is a truth that is fetched. And what he fetches: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (3:22-23). Said with the smoke still rising. Mercies new every morning means yesterday’s mercy was not the last shipment, and tomorrow’s is already minted. This is the difference between optimism, which predicts outcomes, and hope, which trusts a Person. Optimism died when the wall broke. Hope wrote this poem in the ashes.

NOW THE BOOK’S ACTUAL ENDING. READ JEREMIAH 52:31-34 ALOUD.

5. Of all the ways to end this book, the editors chose four verses set in the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's exile, decades after the fall. Who is released, from what, and list every detail of how he is treated. Why on earth does the book of Jeremiah end HERE?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah, is released from prison by a new Babylonian king, spoken kindly to, given a seat above the other captive kings, his prison garments exchanged, and “dined regularly at the king's table” every day of the rest of his life (52:31-34). The book ends with a son of David: alive, out of prison, in new clothes, at table. After the fire and the rubble, the canonical last word is an ember of the promise to David, still glowing. It looks like a footnote. Wait.

6. Live discovery. The last one of the study. Follow the ember. Open the New Testament to its very first page, the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1, and search the verses around the deportation to Babylon for a name that sounds like Jehoiachin. Find it, and say out loud what it means.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

“And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel” (Matthew 1:12). Jechoniah IS Jehoiachin: the released prisoner dining at the king's table in the last verses of Jeremiah stands in the family tree of Jesus Christ. The ember the book ends on is the line the Messiah comes down. The Bible's first page answers Jeremiah's last one. And now name what your group can see: the son of David released from prison, given new garments, seated at the king's table forever, is not only Jehoiachin. In it Christians can hardly help seeing the whole Gospel in miniature, and themselves: released, re-clothed in baptism, and seated at the King's table, which this study learned in Session 8 to call the new covenant in His blood. The strangest ending in the prophets turns out to be an invitation to see the shape of the Gospel already glowing in the ember.

Steelman: Was Jeremiah's Ministry a Failure?

BUILD THE CASE AT FULL STRENGTH: PRESENT IT AS A HARD-NOSED HONEST OBSERVER WOULD

The case: “Run the numbers. Forty years of preaching: no recorded revival, no king converted, no policy changed, the city burned on schedule, and the prophet died in Egypt, in the land of the original slavery, ignored to the end, possibly killed by his own audience. If a missionary reported these results, we would shut the mission down. We measure ministries by fruit, Jesus said we would know them by their fruits, and by every visible metric this ministry failed. Faithfulness is admirable, but let us be honest about outcomes: Jeremiah lost.” Present it coldly; its power is its plausibility, and half the room measures their own lives this way.

7. First press: audit the harvest on God's timeline instead of Jeremiah's. From this study alone, list what Jeremiah's “failed” ministry produced after his death. Start with a reader in Babylon, and end at an altar near you.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The letter that taught the exiles to build and plant, shaping faithful Jewish life in diaspora for centuries. The prophecy Daniel perceived “in the books” in Babylon, turning the foretold years into prayer (Daniel 9:2). The seventy-year framework that dated the return itself. The words Jesus chose for cleansing the Temple (Matthew 21:13) and, above all, the phrase He reached for at the institution of the Eucharist: the new covenant (Luke 22:20), proclaimed at every Mass on earth this morning. The longest Old Testament quotation in the New (Hebrews 8). Twelve weeks of your group’s conversions, twenty-six centuries downstream. The man saw almost none of his fruit because the tree God planted in him was not a forty-year crop. Success measured at the wrong harvest date always looks like failure.

8. Second press: what did God actually ask Jeremiah to produce? Go back to the job description of 1:7-8 and the promise of 1:19. Was outcomes ever in the contract? And what does that mean for how you measure your own life?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The commission was: go where I send you, speak what I command you, do not be afraid, I am with you to deliver you (1:7-8, 19). Speak, unafraid: that was the whole contract; the staying was his love’s own addition (40:6). Results belonged to God, on God’s calendar; fidelity belonged to Jeremiah, daily. And through every assault the book narrates, the promise held: they fought against him, and they did not prevail (1:19): not the priests, the kings, the cistern, or the fire. The Christian metric is the same: we are asked for faithfulness, not for visible victory, and the fruit Jesus spoke of is character and obedience before it is ever statistics. By the only metric in his contract, Jeremiah is one of the most successful men who ever lived. So, quietly, may be some people in this room whose numbers look small.

The Retrospective: Gathering the Threads

9. The capstone. Leader: this study was built on three hidden threads, and every secret is now expired. As a group, reconstruct them from memory: where was each planted, how did it develop, and where did it resolve? Build the map together on paper or a board; prompt from the answer only where memory fails.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Thread 1, Build and Plant: planted in the six verbs of 1:10 and sealed in your envelopes; developed when the verbs turned conditional at the potter’s house (18:7-10) and became commands to the exiles (29:5); resolved when they returned in 31:28 carrying the almond verb, and the answer was read: a new covenant, written on hearts, sealed in a cup (31:31-34; Luke 22:20). **Thread 2, the Prophet Like Jeremiah:** planted at 1:5 and 1:19; breadcrumbed through the stocks, the Temple trial, the gentle lamb (11:19), the familiar friends (20:10), the cup (25:15), and the cistern; resolved when the crowds answered “Jeremiah” (Matthew 16:14), and completed by the differences: the type was rescued, the Fulfillment rose. **Thread 3, the Watched Word:** planted at the almond branch

(1:12); claimed as fire and hammer (23:29); tested by penknife and brazier and resolved when the scroll came back longer (36:32), sealed by “my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). And tonight’s discovery gathered all three: the verbs, the Sufferer, and the word all flow into one genealogy, one Person, one table. The book was one story the whole time. So is yours.

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

S1. Out of twelve sessions, which single discovery are you taking with you for life, and what will be different because of it?

S2. Jeremiah’s contract was to speak, unafraid, and his love added the staying. In the Babylon where God has planted you, what is the one-sentence version of your contract, your personal rule of life from this book?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK AND BEYOND

- Write your rule of life from S2 on a card and put it in your Bible at Jeremiah 1, next to your opened guess at chapter 31. Revisit both in one year.
- Continue the story: read the book of Baruch this month, the deuterocanonical book bearing the name of Jeremiah’s faithful secretary, and Lamentations in full during the next Lent.
- At Mass this Sunday, when you hear “the new and eternal covenant,” let it be your study’s permanent souvenir: you know the promise behind that phrase, the new covenant Jeremiah announced and Christ sealed in His blood, and what it cost, and that it was written for your heart by name.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, You watched over Your word through fire and ruin and performed it to the letter. You built and planted what no army can burn: a covenant written on hearts, sealed in the blood of the Lamb, served at Your table. Your steadfast love never ceases; Your mercies are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. Send us now as You sent Your prophet: to speak and to stay, unafraid, because You are with us. Through Christ our Lord, the righteous Branch, the new covenant in person. Amen." (Closing Prayer)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23, RSV2CE)

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 39, 52 and Lamentations 3

Primary Text

- Jeremiah 39:1-10 · the fall; the poor inherit vineyards (Q1)
- Jeremiah 40:1-6 · the prophet's choice to stay (Q2)
- Jeremiah 41-43 · Gedaliah; the flight to Egypt (Q3, leader narrative)
- Jeremiah 45:5 · Baruch's oracle: your life as a prize of war (Q3)
- Jeremiah 52:31-34 · Jehoiachin released; the king's table (Q5)
- Lamentations 3:19-24 · hope fetched from memory (Q4, memory verse)

Roots and Fulfillment

- Deuteronomy 28 · the covenant curses executed (leader background)
- 2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 11:36; Jeremiah 33:17 · the throne promise and the lamp of David (Q5 background)
- Matthew 1:11-12 · Jechoniah in the genealogy of Christ (live discovery, Q6)
- Daniel 9:2; Matthew 21:13; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8-12 · the harvest audit (steelman Q7)
- Jeremiah 1:7-8, 19 · the contract: speak, unafraid (steelman Q8)

The Threads (Q9)

- Thread 1 · 1:10; 18:7-10; 29:5; 31:28-34; Luke 22:20
- Thread 2 · 1:5, 19; 11:19; 20:10; 25:15; 37-38; Matthew 16:14
- Thread 3 · 1:12; 23:29; 36:32; Matthew 24:35

Catechism

- CCC 313-314 · God master of history; the saints' confidence
- CCC 1821 · persevering hope