

A CATHOLIC JOURNEY THROUGH COVENANT HISTORY

I Will Be Your God

From the Garden to the Wedding Feast

"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

Genesis 17:7 (RSV2CE)

An Inductive Bible Study in Twelve Sessions
Leader Guides | Discussion Guides | Take-Home Sheets

USING THIS GUIDE

This study tells the whole Bible as one story: the story of a God who binds himself to a human family by covenant, and widens that family, oath by oath, from a couple in a garden to every tribe and tongue and people and nation at a wedding feast. It is built for young adult small groups of roughly six to twelve, meeting for ninety minutes per session across twelve sessions, and it assumes nothing except a Bible (RSV2CE recommended), a pen, and hunger.

The method is inductive discovery. Participants are never told what a passage means before they have wrestled with it; the questions are engineered so that the group finds the connections, Exodus in the Upper Room, Jeremiah in the chalice, Eden in the Apocalypse, with their own eyes. What a group discovers, it keeps. Leaders should therefore treat the shaded ANSWER boxes as confirmation to be shared after the discussion, never as a script to be read in place of it, and should guard the spoiler discipline flagged in each session's Thread Watch with real seriousness: several of the study's largest moments, above all in Sessions 8, 10, and 12, depend on the group meeting a text fresh.

Each session has three parts. The Leader Preparation Guide (read it early in the week, with your Bible open) gives the session overview, the background you need, verified voices from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, Catechism connections, the Thread Watch, session goals, and a time plan with pre-chosen cuts for nights that run long. The Discussion Guide is the meeting itself: opening prayer, two Win questions to warm the room, the Build sequence of inductive questions with answers, live discoveries, steelman chains that present opposing readings at full strength before answering them from the text, and Dig Deeper enrichment, then two Send questions, Live It This Week practices, a closing prayer, and a Scripture memory verse. The Leader Reference Card lists every passage in order of use, so you can flag your Bible before anyone arrives.

The Take-Home sheets are distributed AFTER each session ends, never before: they recap what the group found, carry that session's three Voices of the Church, the Live It practices, the memory verse, the reading for next time, and Catechism references. Take-Home 1 includes the sealed My Guess box; make sure every participant writes a guess in week one and keeps the sheet, because the guesses are opened, with some ceremony, in Session 10. Session 8 requires a whiteboard or large paper for the chart the group builds; bring the chart back, completed, for Sessions 10 and 12.

A note on fidelity: this study aims at complete faithfulness to Catholic doctrine. Patristic citations are verified and paraphrased faithfully, never fabricated; Catechism references are checked; and where the Church has not defined a matter, an authorship debate, a disputed Hebrew reading, a scholarly proposal like the fourth cup, the study says so honestly and holds the point with open hands. Precision is devotion's best friend, and a group that watches its leader hedge honestly where honesty is owed will trust the leader completely where the Church speaks definitively.

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Take-Home sheets 1 through 12 are provided as individual documents and as a single merged PDF for duplex printing.

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover from the text that a covenant is not a contract but a sworn family bond, and that creation itself is covenant shaped, crowned by the Sabbath as its sign.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church reads all of salvation history as one plan of covenants by which God gradually binds the human family to himself (CCC 54 to 64). This session lays the foundation the other eleven build on.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*. Scripture never says people "sign" or "make" a covenant in the ordinary sense; the idiom is *karath berith*, literally "to cut a covenant" (see Genesis 15:18). The cutting language comes from the ritual of dividing sacrificial animals and swearing an oath, which participants will encounter firsthand in Session 4. For now, the point is simpler: covenants are made in blood and sealed by oath, which already tells us they are more serious than paperwork.

The single most important distinction in this whole study is covenant versus contract. A contract exchanges goods and services: my labor for your money. A covenant exchanges persons: I am yours and you are mine. Marriage is the clearest surviving example. When covenants are made in Scripture, the parties swear oaths, share a meal, and begin to use family language: father and son, husband and bride, "my people." Scholars who study ancient Near Eastern treaties confirm that covenant language is kinship language; a covenant makes family out of those who were not family.

Genesis 1 to 2 never uses the word *berith*, but the chapters are built like a covenant. The account moves in seven days, and in Hebrew the verb "to swear an oath" (*shava*) is related to the word for seven (*sheva*); the etymology is suggestive though debated, but many scholars propose that to swear an oath could be heard as "to seven oneself" (compare Genesis 21:27 to 31, where Abraham and Abimelech swear at Beersheba, "the well of the seven," or "well of the oath"). Creation climaxing on a blessed and hallowed seventh day is creation shaped like an oath.

Two later texts confirm the instinct. Exodus 31:16 to 17 calls the Sabbath "a perpetual covenant" and "a sign for ever" rooted in the seven days of creation. Jeremiah 33:20 to 21 and 33:25 speak of God's "covenant with the day and night," treating the created order itself as covenantal. Hosea 6:7 may say that Israel "like Adam transgressed the covenant," which would name an Adamic covenant explicitly; be honest with the group that the Hebrew of that verse is debated (it can also be read as a place name, "at Adam"). The case for a covenant with Adam does not rest on one contested verse; it rests on the shape of Genesis 1 to 2 and the witness of Exodus and Jeremiah. One distinction to keep crisp in your own mind as leader: "creation is covenant shaped" is a well grounded inference that many Catholic scholars draw and the Church's reading of salvation history welcomes (CCC 288 calls creation the first step toward the covenant), but the Church has not formally defined a distinct Adamic covenant. Teach the shape with confidence and the label with a light touch; the study's argument never depends on the label.

Finally, notice what the covenant is for. God does not create Adam as an employee but as a son (Luke 3:38 ends the genealogy of Jesus with "Adam, the son of God"). Eden is described with sanctuary language: Adam is

placed in the garden "to till it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15), the same word pair (*abad* and *shamar*) later used for the Levites' service in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7 to 8). The garden is a temple, the seventh day is its liturgy, and the first family is its priesthood. Covenant, worship, and family arrive together on page one.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

This session is itself the root system; the fulfillment will unfold across the study. But plant one forward looking marker now. The scope of this first covenantal bond is one couple, Adam and Eve, with the blessed seventh day as the sign of that bond, a connection Exodus 31:16 to 17 makes explicit for Israel and one this study reads back into Eden (remember the leader note: the covenant shape is well grounded; the label "Adamic covenant" is held with a light touch). Watch what happens to that scope as the study proceeds: a couple, then a household, then a tribe, then a nation, then a kingdom, and finally the whole world. Do not name this pattern for the group; they will find it themselves.

The New Testament reads Adam as "a type of the one who was to come" (Romans 5:14). Where the first Adam is son of God by creation and covenant, Christ is Son of God by nature, and his obedience answers Adam's disobedience (Romans 5:19). The Sabbath rest of Genesis 2 likewise points forward: "there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). Every thread this session plants runs all the way to Revelation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 11*

Writing in the second century, St. Irenaeus taught that God gave a series of covenants to the human race, unfolding one plan of salvation in stages. The manuscript traditions differ on how he numbered them, but his core conviction is clear and became the Church's own: history is not a scrap heap of divine experiments but one covenant story told in movements, like a symphony.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

Preaching through Genesis in Antioch, St. John Chrysostom marveled at God's condescension (*synkatabasis*), his stooping down to communicate with us in human ways. God blesses and hallows the seventh day, Chrysostom taught, not because God grows tired, but to teach us to consecrate time itself to him and to lift our eyes from labor to the Lord of labor.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II *Catecheses on Human Love (Theology of the Body), catecheses 9 and 13 to 15*

Reflecting on Genesis 1 to 2, St. John Paul II taught that man images God not only as an individual but in the communion of persons, and that the union of Adam and Eve carries a spousal meaning stamped into the body itself. From there this study draws its own arc: the opening scene of Scripture is spousal, which is exactly where the last scene of Scripture will land.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 54 to 55. God, who creates and conserves all things, gives men constant evidence of himself and, after the fall, buoyed them up with the hope of salvation and never ceased to show his solicitude for the human race, "for he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well doing."

CCC 288. Creation is revealed as the first step toward the covenant, the first and universal witness to God's all powerful love.

CCC 346 to 348. Creation has its own goodness and proper laws; the Sabbath is at the heart of Israel's law, and its observance recalls both creation and liberation. Keeping the seventh day is a sign of the irrevocable covenant.

CCC 2569. Prayer is lived first of all beginning with the realities of creation; the first nine chapters of Genesis describe this relationship with God, from Abel's offering to Noah who walks with God, and in his indefectible covenant with every living creature God has always called people to prayer.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Thread A, the widening family: Session 1 scope is one couple. The scope widens every few sessions. Never announce it; around Session 8 the group will be led to chart it themselves.
- Thread B, blood and oath: this session establishes that covenants are "cut." No blood is shed yet in Eden, but the vocabulary is loaded. Covenant after the fall is repeatedly ratified in blood and sacrifice (Noah's altar, Abraham's cut animals and circumcision, Sinai's blood of the covenant), and the thread resolves at a cup in Session 10. Note for yourself: the Davidic covenant narrative includes no blood rite; be ready if a participant spots this.
- Thread C, the mountain: Eden is elevated ground (a river flows out of it to water four lands, Genesis 2:10, so the garden sits above them). File this quietly; the group will meet Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Zion, and Calvary in turn.
- The covenant formula, "I will be your God and you shall be my people," has not yet been spoken. When it first appears in Session 5, treat it as an event. From then on, the group hunts for it.
- Sealed guess: Take-Home 1 carries the My Guess box. Collect nothing; participants keep their sheet and fold the corner. It opens in Session 10.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can state the difference between a contract (exchange of goods) and a covenant (exchange of persons) in their own words.
2. Participants have discovered from Exodus 31 and Jeremiah 33 that creation and Sabbath are covenantal, rather than being told so.
3. Participants have seen the priestly and sanctuary texture of Eden (Genesis 2:15 with Numbers 3:7 to 8).
4. The group understands the ground rule of the study: we find it in the text before the leader confirms it.
5. Every participant leaves with Take-Home 1 and writes a sealed guess.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: the covenant versus contract discussion (Q1 to Q3) deserves 20 of those minutes because everything else in the study leans on it. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q6 (the Beersheba word study) to a leader explanation rather than a lookup.

- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on Eden as sanctuary for home reading instead of live discussion.

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, before we asked, you acted. You built the world like a temple, filled it with light, and rested on the seventh day to teach us where rest is found. Open the Scriptures to us tonight, and open us to the Scriptures, so that we may recognize your oath beneath the order of things and answer it with our lives. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Think of a promise someone kept to you over a long period of time, years, not days. What did their faithfulness cost them, and what did it build in you?

W2. When you hear the word "covenant," what comes to mind first? Where have you actually heard the word used in real life?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Let us start with a working question before we open the text. What is the difference between hiring a babysitter and adopting a child? Both involve care for a child. What actually changes?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Draw out: the babysitter arrangement is a contract, an exchange of services for payment, and it ends. Adoption is an exchange of persons; the child becomes family, takes the name, inherits. This is the covenant and contract distinction the whole study rests on. A contract says "this is yours"; a covenant says "I am yours."

2. Read Genesis 2:23 to 24 aloud. When Adam says "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," what kind of relationship is he declaring? Now look at 2 Samuel 5:1 to 3, where the tribes tell David "we are your bone and flesh" and then cut a covenant with him. What does that parallel suggest the words meant?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In 2 Samuel 5 the "bone and flesh" formula appears in an explicit covenant making scene, David's anointing as king. The phrase is kinship covenant formula language. Adam is not making an observation about anatomy; he is claiming kinship in the very words Scripture later uses in a covenant making scene, and Scripture receives this first marriage as covenant (Malachi 2:14 calls a wife 'your wife by covenant'). The first recorded human words carry the character of covenant kinship, and the first marriage is the model of every covenant to come.

3. Read Genesis 2:1 to 3. What three things does God do on the seventh day, and what does he notably not do with it? (Hint: compare the endings of days one through six.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He finishes, he rests, he blesses and hallows the day. And the seventh day alone has no "evening and morning" formula; it is open ended. The Fathers loved this detail: the seventh day is not a slot in the calendar but an invitation, a rest that stays open for us to enter (Hebrews 4 will say exactly this).

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

4. Genesis 1 and 2 never use the word "covenant." So here is the test. Somewhere in Exodus 31, God tells Moses what the Sabbath is. Find it. What does God call the Sabbath, and what does he root it in?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 31:16 to 17: the Sabbath is "a perpetual covenant" and "a sign for ever," because "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested." God himself connects Sabbath, covenant, and creation. The group has just discovered that creation is covenant shaped from a verse most of them have never noticed.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. One more witness. In Jeremiah 33, God defends the permanence of his promises by pointing to something in nature. Skim verses 19 to 26 and find what God calls his arrangement with creation.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jeremiah 33:20 and 25: "my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night." If day and night are covenantal, then Genesis 1, which established day and night, invites us to read creation itself as covenant making. That is an inference, but two independent witnesses, Exodus and Jeremiah, now support what the seven day shape of Genesis hinted.

6. A Hebrew detail worth seeing: the verb "to swear an oath" is built on the word "seven." Read Genesis 21:27 to 31, where Abraham and Abimelech make a covenant at Beersheba. What do the seven lambs do in that scene, and what does the place name mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The seven ewe lambs are the witness of the oath, and Beersheba means "well of the seven" or "well of the oath"; the text puns on both. Many Hebrew scholars have heard in the verb "to swear" (shava) the word "seven" (sheva), as if to swear were "to seven oneself," and Genesis 21 itself plays on both. So a creation story that counts to seven and hallows the seventh is a creation story sworn like an oath. God has, so to speak, sevened himself to the world.

Build, Then Press | "A Covenant Is Just an Ancient Contract"

Give this position its full strength, because serious scholars hold a version of it. Archaeologists have recovered ancient Near Eastern treaties, especially Hittite treaties between great kings and lesser kings, that look strikingly like biblical covenants: a preamble, a history of the relationship, stipulations, witnesses, blessings and curses. On this reading, "covenant" is simply the ancient world's legal technology, international contract law, and Israel borrowed the form. Nothing mystical, nothing familial; paperwork with a sword behind it.

7. The parallels are real, so do not wave them away. Instead, press the texts: in those same treaties, what do the kings call each other? And in tonight's passages, what kind of language keeps surfacing where we expect legal language: Genesis 2:23, Luke 3:38, and later "I will be your God and you shall be my people"?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Even in the pagan treaties, the vassal king is called "son" and the great king "father," and loyalty is called "love." The legal form is real, and scholars debate how far the family language goes: some read treaty "love" as legal loyalty language (so William Moran), while others, such as Frank Moore Cross, argue covenant was precisely the ancient way of making kin of those who were not kin. Scripture takes the kinship instinct all the way: Adam is son of God (Luke 3:38), Eve's bond is "bone of my bones," and the covenant formula we will meet in Session 5 is adoption and marriage language, not billing language. The steelman is right that covenants have legal structure; it misses that the structure is scaffolding for a family.

DIG DEEPER **Eden Is a Sanctuary**

Genesis 2:15 says Adam was placed in the garden "to till it and to keep it" (*abad* and *shamar*). The only other place the Old Testament pairs those two verbs is for the Levites' liturgical service guarding the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7 to 8, 8:26). Add the details: God walks in the garden (Genesis 3:8) as he will later walk in the sanctuary (Leviticus 26:12), the entrance faces east and is guarded by cherubim (Genesis 3:24), just like the tabernacle, and gold and onyx (Genesis 2:11 to 12) reappear in the sanctuary. Read together, these details have led Jewish interpreters, the Fathers, and many modern scholars to see Eden as the first sanctuary and Adam as its priest, a reading this study adopts. Keep this in your pocket; it pays off when we reach Sinai and again at the Last Supper.

8. Put it together. If Eden is a sanctuary, Adam is a priest and son, Eve is bound by a covenant vow, and the seventh day is the covenant sign, then what is the created world for? What is the human vocation on page one of the Bible?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Worship and communion. The world is built as a temple so that the human family can live as God's family, with the Sabbath as the standing appointment. Work serves rest; creation serves covenant. This is why the Catechism calls creation "the first step toward the covenant" (CCC 288). It also quietly explains why every rupture in this study will be healed by worship: an altar, a mountain, a sacrifice, a supper.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Where in your week does the contract mindset creep into your relationships with God or with people, giving in order to get? What would the covenant mindset change this week, concretely?

S2. The Sabbath is the sign that we belong to God rather than to our work. What does your current Sunday actually signal about what you belong to?

Live It This Week

- Guard one hour this Sunday as genuine covenant rest: no screens, no errands. Mass plus one unhurried thing that restores you (a walk, a meal with someone, silence).
- Once this week, before you fall asleep, pray one line: "Lord, you have, so to speak, sevensed yourself to the world; teach me to rest in your oath."

- Read Genesis 3 slowly before next session. Just read it; bring your questions.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you did not hire us; you claimed us. You built the world in seven days like a vow spoken slowly, and you have never taken it back. Give us the rest you hallowed, keep us faithful to the bond you cut, and bring us at last to the wedding feast where your oath is fulfilled. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"He is mindful of his covenant for ever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations."

Psalm 105:8 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 2:23 to 24, bone of my bones, the first covenant vow
- 2 Samuel 5:1 to 3, bone and flesh as covenant kinship formula
- Genesis 2:1 to 3, the seventh day blessed and hallowed
- Exodus 31:16 to 17, Sabbath as perpetual covenant and sign (live discovery)
- Jeremiah 33:19 to 26, covenant with day and night (live discovery)
- Genesis 21:27 to 31, Beersheba, seven and the oath
- Genesis 15:18, karath berith, to cut a covenant (leader reference only)

Supporting Passages

- Luke 3:38, Adam the son of God
- Genesis 2:15 with Numbers 3:7 to 8, till and keep, priestly service
- Genesis 2:10 to 12, the river and the gold, sanctuary texture
- Genesis 3:8 and 3:24 with Leviticus 26:12, God walking, cherubim at the east
- Romans 5:14 and 5:19, Adam a type of the one to come
- Hebrews 4:9, a sabbath rest remains
- Hosea 6:7, like Adam they transgressed the covenant (Hebrew debated; leader honesty note)

SESSION 2

The Serpent and the Seed

The Fall as Covenant Breach and the First Gospel

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Genesis 3 unfolds like a covenant lawsuit and a covenant promise in the same chapter: the bond is broken from the human side, yet inside the very curse on the serpent God plants the first promise of a Redeemer born of a woman.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church calls Genesis 3:15 the *Protoevangelium*, "the first gospel," the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer and of the New Eve (CCC 410 to 411).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If Session 1 established that Eden is covenant ground, then Genesis 3 is best read as covenant breach, not merely rule breaking, a reading Scripture itself invites (Hosea 6:7, "like Adam they transgressed the covenant") and Catholic biblical theology has richly developed, though it is an interpretive framework rather than defined doctrine. Adam was given a command with a sanction attached ("in the day that you eat of it you shall die," Genesis 2:17), which is the structure of covenant stipulation and curse. The tragedy is relational before it is legal: the son distrusts the Father, the priest fails to guard the sanctuary, the bridegroom stands silent while the bride is deceived (note Genesis 3:6, "her husband, who was with her").

Watch the serpent's strategy, because it never changes. He begins by misquoting God ("Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree?"), then flatly contradicts him ("You will not die"), then reframes the covenant as a contract rigged against them ("God knows that... you will be like God"). The lie is that the Father is really an employer hoarding wages. The first sin is believing a slander against God's fatherhood, and every sin since has the same root.

The word *nachash* (serpent) is milder than the reality. Elsewhere Scripture uses serpent and dragon language for the great enemy (Job 26:13, Isaiah 27:1), and Revelation 12:9 removes all doubt: "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan." Adam, whose task was to "keep" or guard the garden (Session 1), should have confronted the intruder even at the cost of his life. He did not, and a greater Adam eventually will.

Then comes the astonishing turn. God's first recorded response to human sin is not a curse on the man or the woman (read carefully: the serpent and the ground are cursed, the humans are disciplined but not cursed), and before any discipline is spoken, God embeds a promise in the sentence against the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Three things deserve slow attention. First, "the seed of the woman" is odd; Scripture normally reckons seed through the man, so a decisive descendant counted through a woman hints at something unprecedented. Second, the pronoun is singular: "he shall bruise your head." Third, the victory is costly: the deliverer is himself struck. A wounded victor, born of a woman, crushing the serpent: the whole gospel in one dark verse.

Finally, note the small mercies that close the chapter. Adam names his wife Eve, "mother of all living," which Christian interpreters have long read as an act of faith in the promise just spoken. God clothes them in garments of skins, which implies that animal life was taken: Genesis does not narrate the killing, but the implication stands, and the typological force with it: the first bloodshed Scripture implies is provided by God, to cover human shame. And even the expulsion is mercy with a purpose, "lest he... eat of the tree of life and live

for ever" in a fallen state (Genesis 3:22); the way back to the tree of life is barred until it can be opened rightly, and Revelation 22 shows it open at last.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 3:15 is the taproot of messianic hope, and the New Testament harvests it deliberately. St. Paul tells the Romans, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20), reading the Church into the woman's seed. Revelation 12 stages the verse as a drama: a woman, her male child, and the dragon who is "that ancient serpent."

The Fathers, beginning in the second century, also noticed the reverse symmetry between Eve and Mary: a virgin, a message from an angelic being, and a choice. Eve believed the serpent and disobeyed; Mary believed Gabriel and said yes. The Church never defined every detail of this typology, but it is among the oldest and most universal readings in Christian literature, and it is why Christians came to call Mary the New Eve. Genesis 3:20 calls Eve "mother of all living"; John 19:26 to 27 will show Jesus, at the moment of the serpent's defeat, giving his mother to the beloved disciple, and Revelation 12:17 calls Christians "the rest of her offspring."

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 100 (c. AD 155)*

In the middle of the second century, close to the apostolic age, St. Justin drew the parallel: Eve, a virgin, received the serpent's word and brought forth disobedience and death, while Mary, a virgin, received the angel's word with faith and joy and brought forth him by whom the serpent is destroyed. The earliest Christians read Genesis 3 with Mary already in view.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 22*

St. Irenaeus taught that the knot tied by Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound by unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed by faith. For Irenaeus this is part of Christ's "recapitulation": the Son of God retraces the human story from inside, getting right every step our first parents got wrong.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman *Letter to Pusey (1866)*

Defending Catholic devotion to Mary from the Fathers themselves, St. John Henry Newman observed that the earliest and most widespread patristic title for Mary is the Second Eve, and he argued that everything the Church says of Mary grows from that root: she is no ornament to the gospel but a party to the drama announced in Genesis 3:15.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 397. Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. All subsequent sin is disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

CCC 410 to 411. After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. Genesis 3:15 is the Protoevangelium, the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers. The Christian tradition sees in this passage the New Adam and, in the woman, Mary, the new Eve.

CCC 412. Why did God not prevent the first man from sinning? St. Leo the Great responds: Christ's grace gives us greater blessings than those the demon's envy had taken away. There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin: "O happy fault!"

CCC 2568. In the Old Testament, the revelation of prayer comes between the fall and the restoration of man, that is, between God's sorrowful call to his first children, "Where are you?", and the response of the Son on coming into the world.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Thread A, the widening family: the scope has not widened yet, but it has fractured. Keep the group feeling the wound; the widening covenants to come are God's staged repair of one broken family.
- Thread B, blood and oath: the garments of skins (Genesis 3:21) imply the first bloodshed in Scripture, provided by God to cover sinners (an inference the text invites rather than narrates; say so if asked). Do not press it hard tonight; let it register. It escalates at Noah's altar, Moriah, Sinai, and the cup.
- Thread C, the mountain: the expulsion moves the family eastward, away from the elevated garden. Every covenant to come will climb back up: Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Zion, Calvary.
- New thread planted tonight, the seed of the woman: singular, wounded, victorious. It surfaces again with Abraham's singular seed (Session 4 to 5, Galatians 3:16), David's son (Session 8), and the woman at the cross and in Revelation 12 (Sessions 10 and 12).
- The sealed guess from Take-Home 1 stays sealed. If anyone asks, smile and say we open them in Session 10.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can name the serpent's three step strategy (misquote, contradict, slander the Father) and recognize it in modern dress.
2. Participants have discovered Revelation 12:9 and Romans 16:20 themselves, confirming that Scripture reads Genesis 3:15 messianically.
3. Participants can explain why "seed of the woman," the singular pronoun, and the bruised heel make Genesis 3:15 the first gospel.
4. Participants have met the Eve and Mary typology from the Fathers, presented with the Church's own confidence and restraint.
5. The group has seen that God's response to sin leads with promise (Genesis 3:15, spoken before any judgment falls on the humans) and closes in mercy (the garments of skins, Genesis 3:21).

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give the Genesis 3:15 close reading (Q4 to Q6) a full 25 minutes; it is the theological heart of the night. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Fold Q2 (the silent Adam) into leader commentary during Q1 rather than a standalone discussion.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the garments of skins for home reading.

SESSION 2

The Serpent and the Seed

The Fall as Covenant Breach and the First Gospel

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, when we hid, you came looking. When we believed a lie about you, you answered with a promise. Give us tonight the honesty to see ourselves in Adam and Eve, and the hope to hear, inside the oldest curse, the first announcement of your Son. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

- W1.** What is the most persuasive lie you ever believed for a while, and what finally broke its spell?
- W2.** When something goes badly wrong because of you, what is your instinct: hide, explain, blame, or come clean? Where did we all learn those moves?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

- 1.** Read Genesis 3:1 to 5 aloud. Track the serpent's exact words against what God actually said in Genesis 2:16 to 17. What are his three moves, in order?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First, misquotation framed as a question: "Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree?" (God had said the opposite: eat freely of every tree but one.) Second, flat contradiction: "You will not die." Third, and deepest, slander against God's motive: "God knows that... you will be like God," as if the Father were a rival hoarding privilege. He converts the covenant into a rigged contract in Eve's imagination before she ever touches the fruit. CCC 397 puts it exactly: trust in the Creator died in the heart first.

- 2.** Genesis 3:6 contains four quiet words most readers miss: "her husband, who was with her." Given Adam's job description from last week (Genesis 2:15, to till and to keep, to guard), what should Adam have done, and what does his silence cost?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 3:6 places Adam "with her," and the serpent's "you" in 3:1 to 5 is plural in the Hebrew; the traditional reading, which this study follows, concludes that Adam was present for the temptation and stood silent. On that reading, the guardian priest failed his post: his vocation was to protect the sanctuary and his bride (the sanction of death was addressed to him before Eve existed), and his silence is the first failure of sacrificial headship. Be precise about what that phrase means, because Scripture defines it: headship in the Bible is measured by Ephesians 5:25, "husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," and by the Master who washed feet (John 13:14 to 15). It is the vocation to die first, not the right to be served first; it confers a cross, not a privilege. Hold the thought: the study is heading toward a Bridegroom who, faced with the same enemy, will lay down his life for his bride rather than stay silent.

3. Read Genesis 3:8 to 13. What is God's first recorded question to fallen humanity, and what does the tone of this scene tell us about how God pursues sinners?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Where are you?" God does not open with a verdict but with a summons to relationship, the question a father calls into the dark. The Catechism (2568) hears in this question the beginning of the whole drama of prayer. The interrogation that follows draws out confession (however blame shifting); God is treating them as covenant family to be recovered, not employees to be terminated.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

4. Now the center of the night. Read Genesis 3:14 to 15 slowly, twice. Three details hide in plain sight: whose "seed" is named, which pronoun does the decisive verb take, and what happens to the victor. Find all three.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The seed of the woman (Scripture normally counts descent through the man, so this is deliberately strange and points toward a son uniquely of a woman). The pronoun is grammatically singular: "he shall bruise your head." Hebrew "seed" can be collective, and a collective enmity does run through Scripture (see Q6), but the tradition, already signaled by the ancient Greek translation's striking masculine "he," hears in this singular pronoun one decisive descendant. And the victor is wounded: "you shall bruise his heel." A serpent crusher, born of a woman, who conquers by being struck. The Church calls this verse the Protoevangelium, the first gospel (CCC 410).

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. Does the rest of the Bible actually read it that way, or is that Catholic wishful thinking? Two tests. Somewhere in Revelation 12, the dragon is given his ancient alias; find it. And near the end of Romans 16, St. Paul makes a promise to the Church that echoes Genesis 3:15; find that too.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Revelation 12:9: "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan," in a chapter starring a woman, her male child, and war with the dragon. Romans 16:20: "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet," extending the seed's victory to Christ's body, the Church. Scripture itself confirms the messianic reading; the group has just watched the canon interpret the canon.

Build, Then Press | "It Is Just a Story About Snakes"

Here is the skeptical reading at full strength. Genesis 3:14 to 15 is an etiology, an ancient explanation of observable facts: snakes crawl, people hate snakes, snakes bite heels, people smash snake heads. "Seed" is a collective noun (it usually is), so the verse just predicts perpetual hostility between humans and serpents. Reading a Messiah into it, the objection goes, is theology imported centuries later.

6. Take the reading seriously and press the details it cannot digest. If this is only about literal snakes, why does the sentence address the serpent as a moral agent under judgment? Why is the seed counted through the woman, against the Bible's own convention? Why does the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) render the pronoun with a striking masculine "he" against ordinary grammar, why do the Aramaic Targums connect this verse to the days of the Messiah, and why do the New Testament's own canonical patterns (Romans 16:20, Revelation 12) treat the verse as a promise rather than a zoology lesson? And on the collective reading, what do you do with Revelation 12 and Romans 16:20?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The etiological reading explains the snake but not the sentence. Genesis itself treats the serpent as a personal tempter judged for deception, not a zoological specimen; the woman's seed breaks the ordinary genealogical pattern; and the canon's own last book identifies the serpent as Satan and stages the verse as cosmic war. A collective sense is real (enmity between the serpent's brood and the woman's children runs through Scripture, and Paul applies the victory to the whole Church), but the singular "he" who takes the wound and crushes the head is one man. The Church's reading is not imported; it is exported from the text by Scripture's own authors.

DIG DEEPER **The Garments of Skins**

Genesis 3:21: "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them." Skins imply an animal died; Genesis does not narrate the killing, but the implication is hard to avoid, and it makes this the Bible's first implied death and blood, provided by God himself to cover human shame. The fig leaves they sewed for themselves (3:7) were not enough. Read in the light of the whole canon (Hebrews 9:22), Christian typology has seen here the first hint that covering sin costs a life, and that God himself provides it. File this next to the ram at Moriah, the Passover lamb, and the words "this is my blood." The pattern is planted on the same page as the fall.

7. Read Genesis 3:20 to 24. After the sentence is spoken, find three mercies in the closing verses: one act of Adam's, one act of God's, and one purpose clause explaining the expulsion.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Adam names his wife Eve, "mother of all living," which interpreters have long read as an act of faith in the promise of 3:15 spoken moments earlier: he believes life will come through her. God clothes them (the garments of skins, see the Dig Deeper). And the expulsion itself carries a merciful purpose: "lest he... eat of the tree of life and live for ever" frozen in a fallen state. The gate is barred so it can one day be opened rightly; Revelation 22:2 and 22:14 show the tree of life again, with the redeemed given the right to it.

8. The Fathers noticed a symmetry: a virgin, a spirit messenger, a word to be believed or refused. Set Genesis 3:1 to 6 beside Luke 1:26 to 38. What reverses?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eve, approached by a fallen angel, doubted God's word and grasped; death followed. Mary, approached by a faithful angel, believed God's word and surrendered ("let it be to me according to your word"); Life himself followed. St. Justin and St. Irenaeus drew this out within a century of the apostles: the knot of Eve's disobedience untied by Mary's obedience. This is why the most ancient title for Mary is the New Eve, and why she will reappear at every hinge of this study.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. The serpent's core lie is that God is a rival, not a Father. Where does that lie currently have a foothold in your life, some area where you quietly suspect God's commands are keeping something good from you?

S2. God's first move toward the fallen was a question, "Where are you?", and his second was a promise. Who in your life needs you to imitate that pattern this week, pursuit before verdict?

Live It This Week

- Bring one recurring temptation to Confession this month, and name the lie about God underneath it, not just the act.
- Pray one Hail Mary each day this week, hearing it as Genesis 3:15 answered: the woman, her seed, and the crushed serpent.
- Before next session, read Genesis 6:5 to 22 and chapter 9:8 to 17. Count how many times God says "covenant."

Closing Prayer

Father, we believed a slander against you, and you answered with a promise. Guard us from the ancient voice that calls your love a leash. Teach us the obedience of the New Eve and the courage of the New Adam, and when we fall, find us quickly, clothe us, and set our feet again toward the tree of life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Genesis 3:15 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 2

The Serpent and the Seed

The Fall as Covenant Breach and the First Gospel

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 3:1 to 5 with Genesis 2:16 to 17, the serpent's three moves
- Genesis 3:6, her husband who was with her
- Genesis 3:8 to 13, Where are you?
- Genesis 3:14 to 15, the Protoevangelium (close reading)
- Revelation 12:9, the ancient serpent identified (live discovery)
- Romans 16:20, Satan crushed under your feet (live discovery)
- Genesis 3:20 to 24, Eve, the garments of skins, the barred gate
- Luke 1:26 to 38, the Annunciation, the reversal

Supporting Passages

- Job 26:13 and Isaiah 27:1, serpent and dragon language for the enemy
- Genesis 2:15 with Numbers 3:7 to 8, Adam's guardianship (from Session 1)
- Revelation 12:17, the rest of her offspring
- John 19:26 to 27, the woman at the cross (do not preview; leader only)
- Revelation 22:2 and 22:14, the tree of life regained
- Galatians 3:16, the singular seed (arrives in Sessions 4 to 5; leader only)

SESSION 3

Through Water

Noah, the Household Covenant, and the Bow in the Clouds

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that God's covenant with Noah widens the bond from a couple to a household, that the flood is an act of re-creation as much as judgment, and that the New Testament itself names the flood a figure of baptism.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church has always seen Noah's ark as a figure of the Church and the flood waters as a prefiguration of baptism, "which now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21; CCC 845, 1219).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 6 opens with the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent already at war, exactly as Genesis 3:15 promised: humanity has grown, but "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (6:5). The heartbreaking line is 6:6, God "grieved... to his heart." This is covenant language; contracts are breached, but only family grieves you to the heart. Against that darkness, one man "found favor" and "walked with God" (6:8 to 9), the very verb used of Eden (3:8). Noah is a remnant of the original communion.

The word "covenant" (*berith*) appears in Genesis 6:18 for the first time in the Bible: "I will establish my covenant with you." Interestingly, God says establish (*heqim*), not cut, which many scholars take as confirming rather than creating, upholding the creation bond from Session 1 through one faithful family. Either way, notice the scope: "you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." The covenant unit has widened from a couple to a household. This is Thread A moving, though the group should not be told so yet.

The flood is deliberately narrated as de-creation and re-creation. The waters above and below, separated on day two of creation, collapse back together (7:11 reverses 1:6 to 7); the earth returns to the watery chaos of Genesis 1:2. Then creation happens again: a wind (*ruach*, the same word as the Spirit hovering in 1:2) passes over the waters (8:1), dry land emerges, the animals come out to "be fruitful and multiply" (8:17), and Noah, a new Adam, receives the original blessing verbatim (9:1 with 1:28). The flood is not God losing his temper; it is God washing the world and starting the family again.

The covenant of Genesis 9 comes with a sign, just as, in this study's covenantal reading of Genesis 1, the creation bond carried the Sabbath as its sign: "I set my bow in the cloud" (9:13). The Hebrew word is simply the word for a war bow, and many interpreters have seen here God hanging up his weapon, a warrior's gesture of sworn peace. And the text says, remarkably, that the sign is a reminder for God: "I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant" (9:16). God binds himself.

Note also what the covenant permits and demands. Blood enters the diet with a restriction (9:4) and human life is fenced with the image of God (9:6): the first explicit law about blood, planting Thread B. And note honestly what the covenant does not fix: within a few verses Noah is drunk and shamed in his tent; his son Ham dishonors him in an episode whose exact nature is debated, and Noah's curse falls, strikingly, on Ham's son Canaan (9:20 to 27). The flood washed the world, but not the heart. Something more than water will be needed, and the rest of the study is the story of God providing it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament reads Noah's story in two directions. Forward from Noah: Jesus compares the days of his coming to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37 to 39), and Hebrews 11:7 holds up Noah's obedient fear as faith. Backward from the sacraments: 1 Peter 3:20 to 21 says eight persons "were saved through water," and then, with a boldness that startles many readers, adds "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you." The Greek word is *antitypos*: baptism is the antitype, the reality to which the flood pointed. The Church's Easter Vigil blessing of baptismal water still names the flood among the great foreshadowings.

The Fathers extended the figure to the ark itself: one wooden vessel, one door, one family, salvation inside amid judgment outside, and even the dove returning with the olive branch as an image of the Spirit and peace (compare the Spirit descending "like a dove" at the baptism of Jesus, Matthew 3:16, over the waters of the Jordan). The ark became the Church; the flood became baptism; the dove became the Spirit. None of this is strained: Scripture itself started the chain, and the Church completed it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 15, Chapter 26*

St. Augustine taught that the ark is without doubt a figure of the City of God on pilgrimage, that is, of the Church, saved by the wood on which hung the Mediator. He even saw meaning in the door set in the ark's side, through which all who were saved entered: an image of the wound opened in the side of the crucified Christ, from which the sacraments flow.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Church, Chapter 6 (c. AD 251)*

In the third century, St. Cyprian argued from Noah for the unity of the Church: if anyone outside the ark of Noah was able to escape the flood, then someone outside the Church might also escape. His point was pastoral and urgent: God gave one vessel of salvation, and schism is a decision to swim.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

Preaching on Noah, St. John Chrysostom lingered on the loneliness of righteousness: Noah walked with God for decades against the current of an entire culture, with no congregation but his household. Virtue, Chrysostom insisted, does not take its cue from the crowd; one faithful family was enough for God to save the world through.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 56 to 58. After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin, God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the nations, and it remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel.

CCC 701. At the end of the flood, the dove released by Noah returns with a fresh olive tree branch in its beak, a sign that the earth is again habitable. When Christ comes up from the water of his baptism, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down upon him and remains with him.

CCC 845. To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. She is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which, in the words of the Fathers, is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.

CCC 1219. The Church has seen in Noah's ark a prefiguring of salvation by Baptism, for by it "a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water."

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Thread A, the widening family: couple has become household ("you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives," Genesis 6:18). Say nothing; the chart comes around Session 8.
- Thread B, blood and oath: blood is legislated for the first time (Genesis 9:4 to 6), and Noah's first act on dry land is an altar and a sacrifice (8:20). The pleasing aroma that moves God to swear peace is the thread tightening.
- Thread C, the mountain: the ark rests "upon the mountains of Ararat" (8:4), and the new world plausibly begins with worship on high ground (an inference from 8:4). Second mountain of the study; keep the tally privately.
- The covenant formula has still not been spoken. One session away. Let the anticipation build in your own preparation.
- Baptismal thread opens tonight via 1 Peter 3:20 to 21 and will resolve sacramentally in Session 11 (the Church, baptism, Eucharist).

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have located the first occurrence of "covenant" in the Bible (Genesis 6:18) and noticed the widened scope: a household, not just a couple.
2. Participants can describe the flood as de-creation and re-creation, with Noah as a new Adam (Genesis 9:1 beside 1:28).
3. Participants have discovered 1 Peter 3:20 to 21 themselves and wrestled honestly with "baptism... now saves you."
4. Participants understand the bow in the clouds as God hanging up his war bow, a sworn and self binding peace.
5. Participants can articulate why the flood was not enough: water washed the world but not the heart (Genesis 9:20 to 27).

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: protect 20 minutes for the 1 Peter discovery and the steelman that follows it; that exchange is where the session becomes Catholic formation and not just Bible trivia. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q3 (de-creation parallels) by supplying the Genesis 1 references yourself instead of having the group hunt them.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the dove for home reading.

SESSION 3

Through Water

Noah, the Household Covenant, and the Bow in the Clouds

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, when the world you loved filled up with violence, you grieved to your heart, and yet you would not let the story end. You found one family, you built one vessel, and you carried life through the waters. Carry us tonight. Wash what needs washing, keep us inside the one ark you have given, and hang your bow where our fear can see it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Have you ever had to hold a conviction alone, at work, at school, in your family, while everyone around you shrugged? What kept you standing, or what wore you down?

W2. What is something you own or keep purely as a reminder of a promise (a ring, a photo, a keepsake)? Why do physical signs help?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Genesis 6:5 to 9. Verse 6 says the LORD was "grieved... to his heart." We said in Session 1 that a contract exchanges goods and a covenant exchanges persons. Which kind of relationship grieves you to the heart when it breaks, and what does this verse therefore tell us about how God holds the world?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Breached contracts anger or inconvenience; only broken family bonds grieve to the heart. The verse confirms Session 1 from God's side: he is not a vendor reviewing a failed account but a Father over a ruined household. Note too that "Noah walked with God" (6:9) uses Eden's verb (3:8): amid the wreckage, one man still keeps the garden relationship.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

2. Your homework asked you to count. Where does the word "covenant" appear for the first time in the entire Bible, and read the verse aloud: who exactly is included in it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 6:18, the first *berith* in Scripture: "I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." Let the group notice the roster. In Eden the covenant bond, as we read it in Session 1, embraced a couple; here it embraces a household: two generations, four married couples, under one roof. Do not explain why that matters yet; just make sure they have seen it. (Leader note: God says establish, not cut, which many take as upholding the creation covenant rather than starting from scratch.)

3. The flood is told as creation running in reverse. Compare Genesis 7:11 with 1:6 to 7, and Genesis 8:1 with 1:2. What is being undone, and what begins again?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Day two of creation separated the waters above from the waters below; in 7:11 "the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened," the separation collapses, and the world returns to the watery chaos of 1:2. Then 8:1: a ruach, the same Hebrew word for wind or spirit that hovered over the waters in 1:2, passes over the earth in a deliberate echo of creation, and dry land emerges again. The flood is de-creation followed by re-creation. God is not merely punishing a world; he is washing one.

4. Read Genesis 9:1 to 7 beside Genesis 1:28 to 30. What does God say to Noah that we have heard before, word for word, and what two new laws about blood appear?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" is Adam's blessing repeated verbatim; Noah steps into the world as a new Adam, head of a renewed human family. The new material is about blood: lifeblood may not be eaten (9:4), and human blood may not be shed with impunity because man is made in God's image (9:6). Blood, the carrier of life, is being fenced off as sacred. File it; the study will keep returning to what blood is for.

5. Read Genesis 8:20 to 22. What is Noah's very first act on the renewed earth, and what does God do in response? What does that sequence teach about the relationship between worship and covenant?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifice before he builds a house, plants a field, or does anything else; and it is in response to the pleasing aroma that God resolves never again to destroy every living creature. Worship precedes and undergirds the covenant of peace. Also notice where this happens: the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (8:4), so the narrative strongly suggests the new world begins with sacrifice on high ground. Eden was high ground too. Keep watching the elevation.

6. Read Genesis 9:12 to 17. The "bow" God sets in the cloud is, in Hebrew, simply the word for a battle bow. What is God doing with his weapon, and, strangest of all, who does verse 16 say the sign is meant to remind?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The word is the ordinary Hebrew word for a battle bow, and many readers, ancient and modern, have seen God hanging up his weapon, a warrior's pledge of peace. What the text states outright is stranger still: God will look on it "and remember the everlasting covenant." The sign is for God's own remembering; he has bound himself, publicly, in the sight of every generation. Covenants run on oath, and here God swears one to the whole biosphere, "every living creature of all flesh."

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

7. Does the New Testament ever tell us what the flood was ultimately about? Somewhere in 1 Peter 3, the apostle connects Noah's water to something in your own life. Find the passage and read it exactly as written.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

1 Peter 3:20 to 21: eight persons "were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of

Jesus Christ." Let the plain words land before anyone softens them: baptism now saves you. The Greek behind "corresponds to this" is *antitypos*: the flood was the type, baptism is the reality. This is why the Easter Vigil blessing of the font still names the flood.

Build, Then Press | "Baptism Is Only a Symbol"

State the position at full strength, because devout Christians hold it. On this view, baptism is an outward testimony to an inward faith that has already saved the person; the water does nothing, God does everything, and to say water saves is to confuse the sign with the thing signified, even to smuggle in works. Verses like 1 Peter 3:21 are read as shorthand: baptism "saves" only in the sense that it pictures the salvation faith already received. It is a serious position motivated by a serious concern: protecting the sufficiency of Christ.

8. Honor the concern, then press the text. Peter seems to anticipate exactly this debate: he denies one thing about baptism and affirms another. What does he deny it is, what does he say it does, and through whose power does he say it works? And if it were a bare symbol, why does he choose the verb "saves" and anchor it in the resurrection rather than in the believer's testimony?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Peter denies that baptism is "a removal of dirt from the body," a mere external washing, and affirms that it "now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The power is Christ's, not the water's; that is precisely the Catholic teaching, that the sacraments are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work (CCC 1127; on baptism specifically, CCC 1227). The symbol only view protects Christ's sufficiency by muting Christ's chosen instrument; the Catholic view protects it by letting him work how he said he would. Noah, note, was not saved by his interior faith floating alone: his faith built the ark and got in (Hebrews 11:7). Grace supplied the plan and the rescue; faith obeyed through wood and water. So it is with the font.

Leader note: someone sharp will raise the good thief, or a catechumen who dies before Easter, or the unbaptized martyr. Welcome the question; the Church asked it first. Her answer holds both truths without blinking: "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments" (CCC 1257). The Church has always held that those who die for the faith (baptism of blood) and catechumens who die desiring baptism (baptism of desire) are saved without the font (CCC 1258 to 1260). This is not a loophole that shrinks the sacrament; it is the largeness of the God who gave it. The normal, commanded, covenant path is the water (John 3:5); the God of the covenant remains free to save by extraordinary paths, and that freedom is his, not our presumption. One more precision, especially in mixed company: St. Cyprian's ark image teaches the necessity of Christ and his Church; it does not declare that every person visibly outside Catholic communion is knowingly refusing rescue. The Church distinguishes full incorporation from real but imperfect communion, and teaches that those who through no fault of their own do not know Christ or his Church may yet be saved by grace that always comes from Christ through his Church (CCC 837 to 838, 846 to 848). Schism as a deliberate decision is one thing; a person's inherited situation is another, and God alone judges hearts.

DIG DEEPER The Dove Over the Waters

Three water scenes, one bird. The Spirit hovers over the waters of creation (Genesis 1:2). Noah's dove goes out over the flood waters and returns with an olive branch, the sign that judgment is over and the earth is habitable (Genesis 8:10 to 11). And at the Jordan, as Jesus comes up from the water, the Spirit descends on him "like a dove" (Matthew 3:16), and the Father speaks peace: "my beloved Son." The Catechism (701) draws the line explicitly. Every baptism is a small flood story: the old world drowned, the dove descending, the family walking out onto new ground.

9. Now the honest ending. Read Genesis 9:20 to 23. Within a few verses of the everlasting covenant, what happens in Noah's tent, and what does that tell us about what the flood did and did not accomplish?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Noah, the new Adam, plants a garden (a vineyard), takes its fruit, and ends up naked and ashamed while sin coils through his family; the echoes of Genesis 3 are deliberate. The flood washed the world but not the human heart. Judgment, even total judgment, cannot fix what is broken inside us. So the story cannot end here: God will have to do something more surgical than a flood, and next session he starts, with one old man under the stars.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Noah walked with God against an entire culture with only his household beside him. Where is your ark right now, the community that keeps your head above water, and who are you helping keep afloat?

S2. The bow in the clouds was a sign even God looks at. What visible, physical reminder of your baptism could you put where you will actually see it this week?

Live It This Week

- Find out your baptism date this week (ask a parent, or call the parish office). Put it on your calendar as a yearly feast.
- Next time you enter the church, sign yourself from the font slowly and deliberately, and say in your heart: "I came through the water."
- Before next session, read Genesis 12:1 to 9 and Genesis 15. In chapter 15, pay attention to what happens to the animals, and who passes between them.

Closing Prayer

Father, you carried eight souls through the drowning of a world, and you have carried us through the waters of baptism into the ark of the Church. When the rain is loud and the culture is louder, keep us inside. Show us your bow when we are afraid, and make our households, like Noah's, small vessels of your covenant. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

Genesis 9:13 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 3

Through Water

Noah, the Household Covenant, and the Bow in the Clouds

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 6:5 to 9, grieved to his heart; Noah walked with God
- Genesis 6:18, first occurrence of covenant in the Bible; the household roster (live discovery)
- Genesis 7:11 with 1:6 to 7, and 8:1 with 1:2, de-creation and re-creation
- Genesis 9:1 to 7 with 1:28 to 30, the new Adam; the blood laws
- Genesis 8:20 to 22 and 8:4, altar on the mountain, the pleasing aroma
- Genesis 9:12 to 17, the unstrung bow; God remembers
- 1 Peter 3:20 to 21, baptism now saves you (live discovery)
- Genesis 9:20 to 23, the vineyard and the tent; what water could not wash

Supporting Passages

- Hebrews 11:7, by faith Noah constructed an ark
- Matthew 24:37 to 39, as were the days of Noah
- Genesis 8:10 to 11 with Matthew 3:16, the dove over the waters
- Matthew 3:16 to 17, the Jordan, the dove, the beloved Son
- Genesis 3:8, walking with God (Eden echo)
- Wisdom 10:4, wisdom steered the righteous man on frail wood (optional enrichment)

SESSION 4

Count the Stars

Abram, the Three Promises, and the God Who Walks Between the Pieces

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the three promises of Genesis 12 that structure the rest of the Bible, decode the cutting ceremony of Genesis 15 using Jeremiah 34, and confront its staggering implication: God alone passes between the pieces, taking the covenant curse upon himself.

Catholic Touchstone. God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants; the people descended from Abraham would be the trustee of the promise made to the patriarchs, gathered in preparation for the day when God would unite all his children into the Church (CCC 59 to 60, 762).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 11 ends salvation history's darkest stretch: Babel, the nations scattered, and a genealogy that dead ends in a childless couple, uprooted from Ur and stalled in Haran (11:30 to 32). Then Genesis 12:1 to 3, and God speaks to a seventy five year old childless man. Read the speech slowly and count: God promises to make Abram (1) a great nation, (2) a great name with blessing, and (3) a blessing to "all the families of the earth." Those three promises are the table of contents for the rest of the Bible. Watch how each is later upgraded to a covenant: nationhood sworn at Sinai (Exodus 19 to 24), the great name and dynasty sworn to David (2 Samuel 7), and the worldwide blessing sworn in the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; Galatians 3:8, where Paul flatly calls the promise to Abraham "the gospel, beforehand"). Do not lecture this to the group; tonight they secure the three promises, and the study will let them watch each one blossom.

Genesis 15 is the night the first promise becomes a covenant. Abram, still childless, asks how he can know, and God answers with a ceremony modern readers find bizarre and ancient readers found unmistakable: animals cut in two, the halves laid opposite each other, a path of blood between them. Jeremiah 34:18 to 20 preserves the meaning: parties who "cut a covenant" walked between the pieces, enacting a self curse: may what happened to these animals happen to me if I break this oath. Covenant making was oath swearing with your life on the table.

Now the detail on which everything turns. In the Bible's own example of this rite (Jeremiah 34:18 to 20), it is the parties bound by the covenant who walk between the pieces, taking the self curse on themselves. In Genesis 15:17, Abram is in a deep sleep, and "a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch," fire and smoke being God's standard self manifestation (think Sinai, the pillar of fire), passed between the pieces alone. The ceremony's meaning is staggering: God alone walks the path, God alone places himself under the covenant curse, a unilateral, self sworn oath, with Abram asleep. And Christian readers, following the ceremony's logic through to Galatians 3:13, have long seen here God taking upon himself the consequences for both sides of the covenant. Abram contributes nothing that night but trust: "he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6). The question the ceremony plants, and the question this study will carry for six more sessions, is what happens when the human side breaks the covenant and the self cursed God keeps his word.

Be honest with the group about the promises' scope. Genesis 15:18 includes land, "from the river of Egypt to the great river," and Israel's history takes it seriously; the Church does not allegorize the Old Testament away. But Scripture itself widens the inheritance: Paul says the promise to Abraham was that he would inherit not a strip of the Levant but "the world" (Romans 4:13), and Hebrews 11:9 to 10, 16 says Abraham himself was looking

through the land toward "a better country, that is, a heavenly one," "the city... whose builder and maker is God." Type and fulfillment, not either or.

One more seed to plant quietly: Genesis 15:6 will become the most fought over verse in Reformation history ("faith reckoned as righteousness"). Tonight, simply let the group see what the text shows: Abram's faith is not a one time transaction but the beginning of a costly, obedient, decades long walk, and it will be tested to the edge of death in Session 5. James 2:21 to 23 reads Genesis 15:6 as "fulfilled" on Moriah. Save the full engagement for the next session; plant the observation now.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament treats Genesis 12 and 15 as load bearing walls. Paul builds Romans 4 and Galatians 3 on them: the singular "seed" through whom blessing reaches the nations is Christ (Galatians 3:16), a singular seed the Church's reading traces back to the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, which the group met in Session 2, and all the baptized are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29). Galatians 3:8 goes further than most readers expect: Scripture "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed." The gospel is not plan B after the Old Testament failed; it is the third promise of Genesis 12 kept.

And the fire that passed between the pieces casts a long shadow. Galatians 3:13, which the group will not reach until the study's climax, says Christ redeemed us "having become a curse for us." Christian readers have long seen the One who walked the path of blood alone in Genesis 15 walking it again on a hill outside Jerusalem, with the self imprecation of the smoking fire pot kept in full. This is the Church's typological reading of the two texts together, and it is where this study's thread deliberately lands. Leaders should know where this thread lands; participants should be allowed to feel its weight slowly.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

Preaching on God's dealings with Abram, St. John Chrysostom marveled at the divine condescension: the Lord of all stoops to human covenant customs, accommodating our weakness the way a father lisps with his child, so that Abram could have certainty in a form he could grasp. God does not merely make promises; he makes them in our language, with our rituals, sworn on his own life.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan *On Abraham*

St. Ambrose held up Abram's departure from Ur as the pattern of every soul's conversion: to leave country, kindred, and father's house is to leave the familiar securities that compete with God, trusting a promise you cannot yet see. Faith, for Ambrose, is not the absence of questions (Abram asks them freely) but the willingness to walk while the questions are still open.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 16*

Working through the Abraham narratives, St. Augustine insisted that the promises were spoken to Abraham but aimed at us: the patriarch's story is prophecy in the form of biography. In the fire passing between the divided animals he saw God signifying, in advance and in mystery, the judgment and deliverance that would

come through Abraham's promised seed.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 59 to 60. In order to gather together scattered humanity, God calls Abram from his country and makes him Abraham, that is, "the father of a multitude of nations." The people descended from Abraham would be the trustee of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church.

CCC 705 to 706. Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham, as the fruit of faith and of the power of the Holy Spirit. In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This progeny will be Christ himself.

CCC 762. The remote preparation for the gathering together of the People of God begins when he calls Abraham and promises that he will become the father of a great people.

CCC 2570 to 2571. When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him"; his heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys. Attentiveness of the heart and obedience are essential to prayer; only later does Abraham's first prayer in words appear: a veiled complaint reminding God of his promises which seem unfulfilled. Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Thread A, the widening family: household becomes tribe tonight; Abram moves with an entire clan (Genesis 12:5, "the persons that they had gotten in Haran"). The chart moment is still Session 8. Say nothing.
- Thread B, blood and oath: this is the session where the two halves of the thread fuse. The cutting ceremony IS blood as oath. Handle Genesis 15:17 with unhurried gravity; it is the single most important image in the first half of the study.
- Thread C, the mountain: quieter tonight, but note Genesis 12:8, Abram's altar in the hill country near Bethel. Moriah arrives next session and the thread goes loud.
- The three promises of Genesis 12:1 to 3 are the map of the whole study: nation (Sinai, Session 6), name and kingdom (David, Session 8), worldwide blessing (New Covenant, Sessions 10 to 12). Guard the map; the group draws it themselves over time.
- The sealed guess intersects tonight invisibly: participants guessed how God would bless the whole world through one family. Genesis 12:3 is the verse their guesses were unknowingly about. Do not connect it; Session 10 will.
- The covenant formula watch: still unspoken. It arrives next session in Genesis 17:7 to 8. Prepare to treat it as an event.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can list the three promises of Genesis 12:1 to 3 from the text and know that each returns later in the story.
2. Participants have decoded the cutting ceremony themselves using Jeremiah 34:18 to 20 rather than being told its meaning.

3. Participants have seen and felt the anomaly of Genesis 15:17: God alone passes between the pieces while Abram sleeps.
4. Participants can state the difference between reading the land promise as merely earthly and reading it as type widened to fulfillment (Romans 4:13; Hebrews 11:10, 16).
5. Participants leave carrying the open question the ceremony plants: what will it cost the self sworn God when the human side breaks the covenant?

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: budget a full 25 minutes for the Genesis 15 sequence (Q5 through the steelman); the Jeremiah 34 discovery and the smoking fire pot deserve silence, not speed. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q2 (Babel backdrop) into a two sentence leader setup instead of a discussion question.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on Melchizedek for home reading; it is enrichment tonight and returns in force when the study reaches the priesthood material.

SESSION 4

Count the Stars

Abram, the Three Promises, and the God Who Walks Between the Pieces

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, you called one man out of a dead end city and promised him the world, and when he asked how he could know, you did not scold him; you swore. Swear your promises over us again tonight in the reading of your word. Give us Abram's trust when the path is dark and the fire passes by, through Christ our Lord, the seed in whom all the families of the earth are blessed. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. What is the biggest leap you ever took on somebody's bare word, no contract, no guarantees? What made their word enough?

W2. When you want to be absolutely sure of something, what do you ask for: paperwork, collateral, a promise in front of witnesses? Why do we need promises reinforced?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Set the scene from the end of Genesis 11: Babel has scattered the nations, and the genealogy lands on a childless man, called out of Ur and stalled in Haran, whose wife "was barren; she had no child" (11:30). Why might God deliberately restart the blessing of the whole world with the one couple who, humanly speaking, cannot even continue their own family line?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

So that no one could ever mistake whose work it is. Every covenant advance in this study runs through human impossibility: a barren womb, a drowned world, a shepherd boy, a virgin. God builds his family from materials that cannot take the credit. Abram's biology is a theological statement: the seed of the woman will be the gift of God, not the achievement of man.

2. Read Genesis 12:1 to 3 aloud, slowly. Working straight from the text, how many distinct promises does God make? Name them in your own words and write them down; you will need this list for the rest of the study.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Three: (1) "I will make of you a great nation," nationhood, which requires land and offspring; (2) "I will... make your name great," a royal name, dynasty, greatness; (3) "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," a blessing with the whole world as its range. Have the group physically write the three down. The rest of the Bible is the story of each promise being upgraded from promise to sworn covenant, but do not reveal that; they will catch each one as it happens.

3. Genesis 15 opens with Abram doing something we might expect God to punish: he pushes back. Read 15:1 to 6. What does Abram say to God, how does God respond to the pushback, and what does verse 6 tell us happened in Abram that night under the stars?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Abram respectfully complains: you have given me no offspring; a slave will be my heir. God does not rebuke the honesty; he takes Abram outside, shows him the stars, and renews the promise: "so shall your descendants be." The Catechism (2570 to 2571) calls this the drama of prayer, the test of faith in God's fidelity, and honest complaint is part of it. And verse 6: "he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." File that verse; next session we will watch what that faith does when it is tested to the edge of death.

4. Then Abram asks the question this whole session hangs on (15:8): "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" And God's answer is... a butcher shop (15:9 to 11). Describe exactly what Abram does with the animals. What kind of scene is being set up?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A heifer, a she goat, and a ram, each cut in two, the halves laid over against each other, with a bird on each side, and a path left between the halves; Abram drives the birds of prey away and waits. The group should feel the strangeness. This is not sacrifice on an altar; it is a corridor of blood, a stage set for something to pass through. What that something is, and what walking the corridor means, the Bible itself will tell us next.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. The Bible decodes its own rituals if you know where to look. Centuries later, Jeremiah confronts covenant breakers in Jerusalem, and in Jeremiah 34, verses 18 to 20, he tells them exactly what people were doing when they cut a calf in two and walked between the parts. Find it and read it aloud. What did the ceremony mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jeremiah 34:18: "the men who transgressed my covenant... I will make like the calf which they cut in two and passed between its parts." Walking between the pieces was a self curse, an acted oath: may I become like these animals if I break this covenant. Verses 19 to 20 spell out the sentence being enacted: their dead bodies shall be food for the birds, which may cast a chilling backward light on the birds of prey Abram was driving off the carcasses, a resonance worth letting the group notice, without pressing it as the text's own explanation. To cut a covenant was to put your own life on the table.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Now the moment. Read Genesis 15:12 and 15:17 with complete attention. Who is available to walk between the pieces, in what state is Abram, and what actually passes down the corridor of blood?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Abram is in a deep sleep, a dread filled darkness upon him; he could not walk if he wanted to. What passes between the pieces is "a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch," fire and smoke, the Bible's standard signature of God himself (the burning bush, the pillar of fire, Sinai wrapped in smoke). In Jeremiah 34, the ones bound by the covenant walk between the pieces and take the oath on themselves. Here God, and God alone, walks the corridor: by the ceremony's own logic, the sign of God's presence passing between the pieces signifies that God binds himself alone under the covenant curse, and the Christian tradition, reading this night in the light of the cross, has seen God taking on himself the curse for both sides. Let the room sit in silence with that for a moment before moving on. Then leave the question hanging, unanswered, deliberately: if the human side breaks this covenant, and it will, what happens to the God who swore?

Build, Then Press | "The Promises Were Earthly: Land and Descendants, Nothing More"

Give this reading its full strength; versions of it are held by serious dispensationalist interpreters and by skeptical scholars alike. Genesis 15:18 defines the covenant grant precisely: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." Real acreage, mapped by rivers, to biological descendants. On this reading, spiritualizing the promise into heaven, the Church, or Christ is a later retrofit that dissolves what the text plainly says; the honest exegete keeps the promise as earthly as God stated it.

7. Respect the strength here: the land promise is real, and the Church does not treat the Old Testament as a code to be dissolved. But press two witnesses. First, Paul in Romans 4:13: what does he say Abraham was promised to inherit? Second, Hebrews 11:9 to 10 and 11:16: while Abraham was living in the land of promise, what does it say he was actually looking for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Romans 4:13 says the promise to Abraham and his descendants was "that they should inherit the world," not a strip between two rivers. Hebrews says Abraham lived in the promised land "as in a foreign land," looking forward to "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," desiring "a better country, that is, a heavenly one." So the New Testament does not shrink the promise; it explodes it. The land was real and really given (Joshua 21:43 to 45), the way an engagement ring is really given: true in itself, and true as the pledge of something incomparably larger. Type and fulfillment, both/and. The steelman is right that we must not dissolve the earthly promise; it errs by capping the promise at its down payment. And Galatians 3:8 seals it: the third promise, blessing for all nations, is what Scripture calls "the gospel, beforehand."

DIG DEEPER The Priest King with Bread and Wine

One chapter before the cutting ceremony, a strange figure crosses Abram's path: Melchizedek, king of Salem (the future Jeru-salem), "priest of God Most High," who brings out bread and wine and blesses Abram, and to whom Abram gives a tenth of everything (Genesis 14:18 to 20). He appears from nowhere, no genealogy, no death notice, and vanishes. Psalm 110:4 later swears that the Messiah will be "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," and Hebrews 7 builds an entire theology on him. A royal priest of Salem, offering bread and wine, greater than Abraham: keep him in your pocket. He is not done with this study.

8. Step back and put the night together. Abram asked, "How am I to know?" What is God's full answer, and what does it reveal about the difference between how humans secure promises and how God does?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God's answer to "how can I know" is not an argument but an oath sworn in blood, with God alone bearing its curse. Humans secure promises by distributing risk: contracts, collateral, penalties for the other side. God secures his promise by absorbing all the risk himself: Abram sleeps, God walks. Hebrews 6:13, 17 to 18 says it outright: since God could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself, "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false," so that we might have "strong encouragement." Our hope is not that we hold on to God well, but that God has sworn on his own life to hold on to us.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Abram's faith and his honest questions lived in the same heart ("How am I to know?"). What question are you currently carrying that you have been afraid to ask God directly? What would asking it in prayer this week look like?

S2. God secured his promise by taking the whole risk himself. Where in your life are you still living contract style with God, hedging, keeping collateral, insuring against him? What is one hedge you could surrender this week?

Live It This Week

- One clear night this week, physically go outside and look at the stars for five minutes. Pray one line: "Lord, you kept your word to Abram; I trust you to keep it to me."
- Write your hardest honest question to God on a card and put it in your Bible at Genesis 15. Ask it in prayer once a day this week; Abram shows that covenant faith asks.
- Before next session, read Genesis 17:1 to 14 and Genesis 22:1 to 19. In chapter 17, watch for a sentence in which God says what he will be to Abraham's family. In chapter 22, note every detail about the wood, the mountain, and who carries what.

Closing Prayer

Father, when Abram asked how he could know, you did not hand him an argument; you walked the corridor of blood alone while he slept. We sleep too, Lord, and doubt, and hedge, and you keep walking. Hold us in the oath you swore by your own self, and when we cannot see the road, let us at least count the stars. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Genesis 15:6 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 4

Count the Stars

Abram, the Three Promises, and the God Who Walks Between the Pieces

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 11:27 to 32, Babel's aftermath; Sarai's barrenness
- Genesis 12:1 to 3, the three promises (write them down)
- Genesis 15:1 to 6, the complaint, the stars, faith reckoned as righteousness
- Genesis 15:7 to 11, the animals cut, the corridor, the birds of prey
- Jeremiah 34:18 to 20, the ceremony decoded (live discovery)
- Genesis 15:12 and 15:17 to 18, the deep sleep; the fire pot and torch pass alone (live discovery)
- Romans 4:13 and Hebrews 11:9 to 10, 16, the promise widened (steelman)
- Hebrews 6:13, 17 to 18, God swore by himself; two unchangeable things

Supporting Passages

- Genesis 12:5, the clan; and 12:8, the altar in the hill country
- Genesis 14:18 to 20, Melchizedek, bread and wine (Dig Deeper)
- Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7, a priest for ever (leader background)
- Galatians 3:8, the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham
- Galatians 3:16 and 3:29, the singular seed; heirs according to promise
- Joshua 21:43 to 45, the land promise kept in its own order
- James 2:21 to 23, Genesis 15:6 fulfilled on Moriah (next session; leader only)
- Galatians 3:13, became a curse for us (resolution of the fire pot thread; leader only, do not preview)

SESSION 5

The Lord Will Provide

The Covenant Formula, Circumcision, and the Mountain of the Aqedah

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants witness the first full statement of the covenant formula ("to be God to you and to your descendants"), discover circumcision as the covenant sign in the flesh, and climb Moriah with Abraham and Isaac, where faith is tested to the edge of death and God provides the lamb.

Catholic Touchstone. Abraham fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11: he obeyed, he offered his only son, and he considered that God was able to raise the dead. The Church holds him up as the father of all who believe (CCC 145 to 146, 2572).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 17 opens twenty four years after the call of Genesis 12. Abram is ninety nine, Sarai is barren still, and God appears with new names and a new sign. But before either, God speaks the sentence this whole study is named for, and tonight it must land as an event: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). There it is: the covenant formula, the vow at the heart of every covenant to come. From tonight forward the group hunts this sentence through Scripture; it will resurface at the exodus, through the prophets, and it resounds one final, climactic time in the last book of the Bible. Do not reveal the destinations; just make sure they know the sentence when they hear it.

The new names carry the promise: Abram ("exalted father") becomes Abraham ("father of a multitude"), and Sarai becomes Sarah, "princess," for "kings of peoples shall come from her" (17:16). Royal vocabulary is entering the Abrahamic line for the first time; file it, because promise two of Genesis 12 (the great name) is beginning to stir. The covenant sign is circumcision (17:10 to 14), and its logic deserves adult attention: the sign is cut into the organ of generation, marking the truth that the promised future will not be manufactured by human potency but received as gift. It is also given to infants on the eighth day (17:12), which means membership in God's covenant people was never merit based or adult only; a child who can contribute nothing is claimed entirely. Colossians 2:11 to 12 will later connect this sign to baptism, but let that discovery wait for the group to make.

Genesis 22 is the summit of Abraham's story and one of the summits of the Old Testament; the Jewish tradition calls it the *Aqedah*, the "binding" of Isaac. Read it with the group slowly and let the details do their work. The location: "the land of Moriah" (22:2), a name Scripture uses in only one other place: 2 Chronicles 3:1, which calls the temple mount in Jerusalem "Mount Moriah," the identification Jewish and Christian tradition has drawn ever since. The cast: "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" (22:2), the Old Testament's first use of the word love, spoken of a father and his beloved son. The staging: "Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son" (22:6), the son carrying the wood of his own sacrifice up the hill. The son's question and the father's answer: "God will provide himself the lamb" (22:8). And the resolution: a ram caught in a thicket, and a name for the place, "The LORD will provide," with the narrator's note that "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (22:14), future tense, as if the mountain were still waiting.

Isaac's role is easy to miss and essential. He is no toddler; he carries enough wood for a holocaust up a mountain, which means he could have resisted an elderly father, and the text records no resistance. Genesis

does not state Isaac's consent outright, but it stages a scene in which the binding is far easier to imagine if the son permits it, and Jewish tradition itself honored Isaac's willing self offering, and the Fathers saw in the obedient son who carries the wood a figure whose fulfillment the group can be trusted to sense without the leader forcing it. Restraint here is power: name the details, let the room go quiet, move on.

Finally, Genesis 22 ends with something new: an oath. "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD... because you have obeyed my voice" (22:16 to 18), and the third promise of Genesis 12 is repeated under oath: "by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (22:18; the underlying Hebrew word for descendants, *zera'*, "seed," is a grammatically singular collective noun, the thread Paul will press in Galatians 3:16; leader only). Hebrews 6:13 to 18 points at this exact moment: God swore by himself. The promise of Genesis 12 became a covenant in Genesis 15 and is sealed by oath in Genesis 22, on the mountain of provision, over a beloved son who carried the wood and was received back, as Hebrews says, "figuratively speaking," from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament reads this material as its own foundation. Paul argues from Abraham's two states, believing before circumcision (Genesis 15) and sealed after (Genesis 17), that Abraham is father of both the uncircumcised and the circumcised who believe (Romans 4:9 to 12). Colossians 2:11 to 12 speaks of a "circumcision made without hands," locating its fulfillment in baptism, where God claims a person, infant or adult, before and beneath all merit. And the Aqedah supplies the New Testament's deepest grammar for the Father's own act: "He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32) is Genesis 22:16 ("you have not withheld your son, your only son") turned inside out, with God now the Father who does not withhold.

James 2:21 to 23 makes the connection this session has been saving since Genesis 15: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? ... and the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." James says Moriah fulfilled Genesis 15:6. The faith reckoned as righteousness under the stars was not a completed transaction but a living root, and on Moriah it flowered into obedience. The steelman chain tonight takes this head on, fairly and at full strength.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 16, Chapter 32*

St. Augustine read the Aqedah with the Church's eyes: Isaac carrying the wood to the place of sacrifice is a figure of Christ carrying his own cross, and the ram caught by its horns in the thicket signifies the sacrifice that God himself provides. For Augustine, Abraham never doubted God's promise; he reasoned that the God who gave Isaac from a dead womb could give him back from a dead body.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

St. John Chrysostom dwelt on the three day journey to Moriah: God did not ask for a moment's impulse but for three days of walking beside the son he was commanded to surrender. The test, Chrysostom taught, was aimed not at informing God, who knows all hearts, but at revealing Abraham's faith to Abraham and to every generation after him, so that the father of believers would have children who knew what their father was made of.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ephrem the Syrian *Commentary on Genesis*

St. Ephrem, the great deacon poet of the Syriac church and a Doctor of the Church, saw mercy hidden inside the test: God, who never desired the death of the boy, desired the revelation of the father's love, and provided the ram so that Isaac would go free. In Ephrem's reading, the mountain teaches that God asks for everything precisely in order to give back more than he asked.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 145 to 146. Abraham is the model of the obedience of faith: he obeyed the call to go out, he lived in the promised land as a stranger, and he did not hesitate at the sacrifice of his only son. Abraham thus fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

CCC 1150. The chosen people received from God distinctive signs and symbols that marked its liturgical life; among them, circumcision, which is a sign of the covenant, prefiguring what would be given fully in the sacraments of the New Covenant.

CCC 2572. As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, the father of believers, is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. His faith does not weaken, for he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; and so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all.

CCC 706. Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham. In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed; this progeny will be Christ himself, in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will gather the scattered children of God.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- The covenant formula arrives tonight: Genesis 17:7, "to be God to you and to your descendants after you." Treat it as the event it is; slow the room down. From now on the group hunts the sentence. It resurfaces next session at the exodus (do not preview), personalizes onto a king in Session 8, aches through the prophets in Session 9, and is spoken from the throne in Session 12.
- Thread A, the widening family: tribe still, but royal vocabulary enters ("kings of peoples shall come from her," 17:16). The kingdom widening comes in Session 8; say nothing yet.
- Thread B, blood and oath: circumcision is covenant blood borne in the body, and Genesis 22 fuses the whole thread: a beloved son, wood, a mountain, a substitute, and an oath sworn by God on himself. Do not connect it forward; let the images accumulate weight.
- Thread C, the mountain: Moriah is the study's third named summit, and 2 Chronicles 3:1 names the temple mount in Jerusalem "Moriah," where tradition has long placed Abraham's mountain. "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" is future tense. The group should feel that the verse is still waiting; do not resolve it.
- The singular seed thread (Genesis 3:15, Session 2) recurs at 22:18. Galatians 3:16 stays leader only until the study's final movement.
- Sealed guesses stay sealed. Session 10 opens them.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants recognize the covenant formula of Genesis 17:7 as the study's title sentence and know they are now hunting it through Scripture.
2. Participants can explain the logic of circumcision as covenant sign: gift over potency, infants claimed before merit.
3. Participants have walked the details of Genesis 22 slowly: Moriah, the beloved son, the wood carried, "God will provide himself the lamb," the ram, the oath.
4. Participants have engaged the faith and works question at full Reformation strength and can articulate how Genesis 15:6, James 2, and Paul cohere.
5. Participants have connected Genesis 22:16 to Romans 8:32 and glimpsed the Father's side of the Aqedah.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give the Genesis 17:7 formula moment 10 unhurried minutes, then protect 25 for the Aqedah walk through and 15 for the faith and works steelman. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q2 (the new names) into leader commentary delivered while introducing Genesis 17.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on infant circumcision and baptism for home reading; it will resurface naturally in Session 11.

SESSION 5

The Lord Will Provide

The Covenant Formula, Circumcision, and the Mountain of the Aqedah

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, tonight you speak the sentence you have been waiting to say since Eden: I will be your God. Say it over us again. Give us Abraham's ears to hear the promise, Abraham's legs for the three day walk, and Abraham's trust on the mountain where you provide. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Has anyone ever changed your name, a nickname, a title, a new family name, in a way that changed how you saw yourself? What is the power of being renamed?

W2. What is the hardest thing you have ever had to hand over to God, or refused to hand over so far? No details required; just the shape of it.

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Genesis 17:1 to 8 aloud, and when you reach verse 7, stop and read it twice. This study is named after a sentence in this passage. Find it. What exactly does God promise to be, and to whom, and for how long?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"To be God to you and to your descendants after you," an "everlasting covenant," "throughout their generations." This is the covenant formula, the vow at the center of every covenant in Scripture, and its fuller form, "I will be your God and you shall be my people," will now begin echoing through the whole Bible. Tell the group plainly: you now know the sentence. Watch for it. When you hear it, you are standing at a covenant.

2. In the same passage God renames both spouses: Abram becomes Abraham, "father of a multitude," and in verses 15 to 16 Sarai becomes Sarah, "princess," because "kings of peoples shall come from her." A ninety nine year old childless man is named crowd father, and his barren wife is named royalty. What is God doing with these names, and what new kind of vocabulary has just entered the story?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The names are promises worn in public; every introduction Abraham makes for the rest of his life is an act of faith or humiliation, and he must choose which. And the vocabulary is new: kings. Royal language has entered the Abrahamic line for the first time. Remember the second promise of Genesis 12, the great name; something monarchical has begun to stir, and the study will meet it again.

3. Read Genesis 17:9 to 14. The covenant sign is circumcision: cut into the flesh, into the organ of generation, and given to infants on the eighth day. Work out the logic. Why that organ, and why infants who cannot understand or consent?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sign marks the organ of generation because the promise will not be produced by human potency; Abraham's own body is "as good as dead" (Romans 4:19), and the future comes as gift, not achievement. And it marks infants because covenant membership was never earned by understanding or merit: an eight day old is claimed entirely, contributing nothing but existence. God's family has never been adults only, and belonging has never been wage based. Hold that thought; it returns when this study reaches the sacraments.

DIG DEEPER A Circumcision Made Without Hands

Colossians 2:11 to 12 says the baptized were "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... and you were buried with him in baptism." Paul connects the old covenant sign to the new one directly, and the logic carries over: the eighth day infant claimed before merit becomes the infant at the font, claimed by grace before achievement. Moses himself had already pushed the sign inward: "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16). The exterior sign always aimed at an interior surgery, and the study will watch the prophets sharpen that point.

4. Now Genesis 22. Read verses 1 to 8 aloud, slowly. Gather the details as a group and list them: what is the place called, how is Isaac described in verse 2, who carries what in verse 6, and what exactly does Abraham answer in verse 8?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The land of Moriah, which tradition, following 2 Chronicles 3:1, identifies with the mount where Solomon built the temple, the hill country of Jerusalem. Isaac is "your son, your only son... whom you love," the first occurrence of the word love in the Bible, a father for his son. The son carries the wood of his own sacrifice up the hill while the father carries the fire and the knife. And Abraham's answer is one of the most loaded sentences in Scripture: "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." List the details, let them hang in the air, and resist the urge to explain them. The room will feel where this is pointing; trust the text.

5. Isaac carried enough wood up a mountain for a whole burnt offering, which means he was no small child, and Abraham was well over a hundred. Read verse 9 again: Abraham binds him and lays him on the altar. What does that tell us about Isaac's part in this scene?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text records no resistance, and the physics of the scene speak: a young man strong enough to haul the wood could have overpowered an aged father, so the binding is far easier to imagine if the son permits it. Genesis leaves the consent unstated; the tradition, Jewish and Christian alike, has read willing self offering here, and the scene has invited that reading from the beginning. On the traditional reading, the Aqedah is not only the father's surrender but the son's free obedience. The Old Testament's first beloved son goes to the altar freely, carrying the wood.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Abraham said "God will provide himself the lamb." Read Genesis 22:13 to 14. What animal does God actually provide, and what does Abraham name the place? Then look closely at the narrator's comment in verse 14: what tense is it in, and what might that mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A ram, not a lamb; caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham names the place "The LORD will provide," and the narrator adds, "as it is said to this day, On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." Future tense, still open, as if the mountain itself were waiting for the lamb that was promised but has not yet appeared. The verse leaves a vacancy on Moriah. Leave it vacant tonight; the study will come back for it.

Build, Then Press | "Abraham Was Justified by Faith Alone"

Present the Reformation reading at its full strength, because it is built from real texts and driven by a real pastoral fire. Genesis 15:6: Abraham "believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness," before circumcision, before Moriah, before any work at all. Paul seizes exactly this sequence: "to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5), and "we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Romans 3:28). On this reading, Moriah added nothing to Abraham's standing before God; it merely evidenced a justification already complete under the stars. The concern is noble: salvation must be God's gift, not human wages, or grace is destroyed.

7. Honor the concern, because the Church shares it: the Council of Trent itself teaches that nothing before justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification. Now press the texts. Read James 2:21 to 24. What event does James point to when he asks whether Abraham was justified by works? Which verse does James say was fulfilled in that event? And what is the one thing the New Testament says faith cannot be (2:17, 2:24)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

James points to Moriah: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?" And he says that in that act "the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," Genesis 15:6, the steelman's own proof text, which James reads not as a closed transaction but as a living root that flowered into obedience decades later. Faith "apart from works is dead" (2:26), and "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (2:24), the only place in Scripture where the words faith alone appear together. The resolution is not that Paul and James disagree but that they fight different enemies with different vocabularies: Paul's "works of law" are the badge keeping of the old covenant, which never merited grace; James's "works" are the obedience of living faith, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), which Paul demands just as loudly. The Catholic teaching holds both: initial justification is sheer unmerited gift (Trent and the Catechism say so as plainly as any Reformer), and the faith that receives it is a living seed that must flower into love and obedience; as James warns, faith can die if it is severed from works (James 2:26). Genesis 15 is the planting; Moriah is the flower; and the same Abraham, still trusting the same God, is righteous in both.

8. Read Genesis 22:15 to 18, and then Hebrews 6:13 to 18. What does God do at the end of the Aqedah that he has not done before in Abraham's story, and what does Hebrews say it gives us?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God swears: "By myself I have sworn... by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves." The third promise of Genesis 12, the worldwide one, is now under divine oath, and the Hebrew word for descendants, "seed," is again a singular collective, echoing Genesis 3:15, a thread Paul later draws out in

Galatians 3:16 (leader only). Hebrews says God swore by himself because there was no one greater, giving us "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false," so that we who hope might have "strong encouragement," an anchor of the soul. The promise walked the corridor of blood in Genesis 15; on Moriah it is notarized in heaven.

9. Last connection of the night. Genesis 22:16: "because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son." Now read Romans 8:32. What has Paul done with the Aqedah?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" Paul has turned the Aqedah around: on Moriah God stopped the father's hand and provided a substitute; in the fullness of time, the Father himself does not withhold his own beloved Son, and no ram interrupts. What God asked of Abraham for one morning, and then asked no more, God asked of himself in full. Let the group sit with that, and close.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. God renamed Abram before there was any evidence: father of a multitude, still childless. What is God calling you that the evidence does not yet support, and can you wear the name in faith this week?

S2. Abraham walked three days beside what he was surrendering. What is your version of the three day walk right now, the long obedience with the outcome not yet visible, and who is walking it beside you?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray Genesis 17:7 back to God in the first person: "You are my God, and the God of my children after me." If you have children or godchildren, pray it over them by name.
- Identify one "Isaac," something good that has quietly become ultimate, and hand it to God explicitly in prayer this week. Not because he will always ask for it, but because he must be free to.
- Before next session, read Exodus 3:1 to 15, Exodus 12:1 to 14, and Exodus 24:1 to 11. Watch for a family word God uses for Israel, and watch what is done with blood.

Closing Prayer

Father, on the mountain you stopped Abraham's hand and spared the son, and when the fullness of time had come, you did not spare your own. You have sworn by yourself, and your oath is our anchor. Take our bound up Isaacs, our fears, and our futures, and teach us to say with our father Abraham: the LORD will provide. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

Genesis 22:8 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 5

The Lord Will Provide

The Covenant Formula, Circumcision, and the Mountain of the Aqedah

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 17:1 to 8, the covenant formula spoken (verse 7, the study's title sentence)
- Genesis 17:15 to 16, Sarah the princess; kings of peoples
- Genesis 17:9 to 14, circumcision, the sign in the flesh, the eighth day
- Genesis 22:1 to 8, Moriah, the beloved son, the wood, "God will provide himself the lamb"
- Genesis 22:9, the binding, the son's consent
- Genesis 22:13 to 14, the ram; "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (live discovery)
- James 2:21 to 24 with Romans 3:28 and 4:5, the steelman chain
- Genesis 22:15 to 18 with Hebrews 6:13 to 18, the oath sworn by God on himself
- Romans 8:32, the Father who did not spare his own Son

Supporting Passages

- 2 Chronicles 3:1, Moriah is the temple mount
- Romans 4:9 to 12 and 4:19, faith before circumcision; a body as good as dead
- Colossians 2:11 to 12 and Deuteronomy 10:16, circumcision without hands (Dig Deeper)
- Hebrews 11:17 to 19, he considered God able to raise the dead
- Galatians 5:6, faith working through love
- Genesis 3:15 and 22:18, the singular seed (thread; Galatians 3:16 leader only)

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that God redeems Israel as his firstborn son, that Passover is a *zikkaron*, a memorial in which every generation participates, and that the Sinai covenant is sealed with sprinkled blood, the words "behold the blood of the covenant," and a meal in God's presence on the mountain.

Catholic Touchstone. God formed Israel as his people, freeing them from slavery and sealing the covenant of Sinai, giving them his law by the hand of Moses, so that they would recognize and serve him as the one living and true God (CCC 62 to 63).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Four hundred years pass between Genesis and Exodus, and the family has become a people: the tribe of seventy that went down to Egypt (Exodus 1:5) is now a multitude, exactly as promised to Abraham, and enslaved, exactly as foretold in the dark of Genesis 15:13. When God commissions Moses at the burning bush, listen for two things. First, the covenant memory: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:6); the exodus is not a new project but an old oath being kept ("God remembered his covenant with Abraham," 2:24). Second, the family word: "Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, Let my son go that he may serve me; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son" (4:22 to 23). The exodus is a Father recovering a son, and the tenth plague is that sentence carried out.

The formula the group learned in Genesis 17 now expands to its full classic shape. Exodus 6:7: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." Both halves are present for the first time: possession and presence, "my people" and "your God." Make sure the group catches it themselves; they have been hunting this sentence for a session and this is the first payoff.

Passover (Exodus 12) deserves unhurried attention because its logic underwrites the entire sacramental economy. A lamb without blemish, kept by the household for four days; its blood on the doorposts as the marker of covenant protection; and, crucial and often missed, the lamb must be eaten: "they shall eat the flesh that night" (12:8). The blood alone was not the rite; the sacrifice was consumed, the family incorporated into the offering by eating it. And the whole thing is commanded forward: "this day shall be for you a memorial day" (12:14). The Hebrew is *zikkaron*, and a *zikkaron* is not nostalgia. Exodus 13:8 instructs every future father to say "it is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt," and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3 goes further: "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day," spoken to a generation mostly born after Sinai. In Israel's liturgy, the covenant events are not merely recalled; each generation is made present to them and participates in them. The Catechism states this Old Testament principle explicitly (CCC 1363).

At Sinai, the third promise upgrade of the study occurs (though the group charts this later): the tribe becomes a nation. God proposes before he gives the Sinai law: "if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5 to 6). Note the vocation buried in that title: a kingdom of priests exists for the sake of "all peoples"; Israel is elected not instead of the nations but for them, as the trustee of Abraham's third promise.

Exodus 24 is the covenant ratification, and it is the single most important liturgical scene in the Old Testament for this study. Walk its sequence: the words of the LORD are read aloud and the people vow obedience (24:3, 7); young men offer sacrifices; Moses throws half the blood against the altar (Godward) and half upon the people (24:6, 8), binding both parties in one blood, and says the sentence to remember above all others tonight: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (24:8). And then, verses 9 to 11, the scene almost too astonishing to be believed: Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders go up the mountain, "they saw the God of Israel," and under his feet a pavement like sapphire, "and he did not lay his hand on the chief men... they beheld God, and ate and drank." The covenant concludes not with a signature but with a meal in the presence of God. Word, vow, blood, meal: fix that four beat sequence in the group's memory and say nothing more about it. It is the most heavily loaded gun in the entire study.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Everything in this session is root; the study's later sessions are the fulfillment, and the leader must resist harvesting early. But know the map privately. The unblemished lamb whose bones must not be broken (Exodus 12:5, 46) is taken up across the New Testament: John 19:36 cites the unbroken-bone rubric as fulfilled at the cross; 1 Peter 1:19 evokes the lamb without blemish or spot; and 1 Corinthians 5:7 names him outright: "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed." The sentence of Exodus 24:8 is repeated, almost word for word, at a supper in an upper room, and Session 10 is built so that participants discover the echo with their own eyes; if you quote Matthew 26:28 tonight you will spend the study's single largest payoff for nothing. The meal of the elders on Sinai, beholding God and eating, is the Old Testament's deepest anticipation of Eucharistic communion, and Session 11 returns to it. Plant deep, harvest later.

One connection may be made openly because the New Testament makes it pastorally rather than climactically: 1 Peter 2:9 applies Exodus 19:6 to the baptized, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." The vocation of Sinai, priesthood for the sake of the nations, did not expire; it widened. Participants may discover this tonight without any spoiler cost.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Melito of Sardis *On the Passover (c. AD 170)*

In one of the earliest Christian sermons we possess, St. Melito preached the Passover as a mystery both old and new: old according to the law, new according to the Word; the model was in the law, the reality in the Gospel. For Melito the lamb of Egypt was precious precisely because of what it prefigured, the way a sketch is honored for the sake of the finished portrait.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nyssa *The Life of Moses*

St. Gregory of Nyssa read the exodus as the map of every soul's journey: the slavery, the blood marked door, the sea, the wilderness, and the mountain are stages of the life of grace, and Moses' ascent into the dark cloud teaches that the closer one draws to God, the more one leaves behind the need to see in order to trust.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies (on the typology of the lamb)*

St. John Chrysostom asked his congregation why the blood of an irrational lamb could turn away the destroyer

in Egypt, and answered: not because of what it was, but because of what it signified. The power was on loan from the sacrifice it prefigured. Even in Egypt, Chrysostom taught, the blood on the doorposts saved by pointing forward.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 62 to 63. God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God. Israel is the priestly people of God, called by the name of the LORD, the people of "the elder brethren" in the faith of Abraham.

CCC 709. The Law, the sign of God's promise and covenant, ought to have governed the hearts and institutions of the people descended from Abraham's faith; if Israel lives as God's firstborn son, it becomes the herald of the kingdom for the nations.

CCC 1150. Among the signs of the Old Covenant marking the liturgical life of the People of God are circumcision, the anointing and consecration of kings and priests, sacrifices, and above all the Passover. The Church sees in these signs a prefiguring of the sacraments of the New Covenant.

CCC 1363. In the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- The covenant formula reaches full form tonight: Exodus 6:7, "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." This is the group's first hunt payoff; let them find it and celebrate the find.
- Thread A, the widening family: nation. Exodus 19:5 to 6 makes it official, and 4:22 makes the family grammar explicit: Israel is God's firstborn son. The chart moment is Session 8; keep holding.
- Thread B, blood and oath: tonight the thread speaks its own name, "behold the blood of the covenant" (24:8), half on the altar, half on the people, both parties bound in one blood. DO NOT quote or allude to Matthew 26:28. Session 10's entire architecture depends on the group hearing the echo fresh. Guard this above everything.
- Thread C, the mountain: Sinai, the study's fourth summit, and for the first time the mountain hosts a covenant meal: they beheld God, and ate and drank (24:11). Word, vow, blood, meal. Plant the sequence; say nothing about where it recurs.
- The lamb thread from Moriah ("God will provide himself the lamb") quietly gains mass tonight: unblemished, kept in the house, blood applied, flesh eaten, bones unbroken. Do not connect it aloud; the accumulating images are doing their own work.
- Sealed guesses remain sealed. Two sessions to go.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have found the full covenant formula in Exodus 6:7 themselves, their first payoff in the formula hunt.

2. Participants can explain Israel as God's firstborn son and the exodus as a Father recovering his child under the old oath to Abraham.
3. Participants can articulate what a *zikkaron* is from Exodus 12:14, 13:8, and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3: participation, not nostalgia.
4. Participants have walked the four beat sequence of Exodus 24, word, vow, blood, meal, and can repeat "behold the blood of the covenant" from memory.
5. Participants have seen that the lamb was eaten, not only slain, and that priesthood at Sinai exists for the sake of all peoples.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give Passover 20 minutes, the memorial steelman 15, and protect the final 20 for Exodus 24; the meal on the mountain should be the last and slowest thing the group sees. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q1 (the burning bush covenant memory) into leader framing while introducing the session.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the unbroken bones for home reading.

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, you heard your people groan in Egypt and you remembered your covenant, because you never forget it. You brought out your firstborn with a strong hand, marked his doors in blood, and fed him at your table on the mountain. Remember us tonight; mark us, feed us, and teach us what your blood covenant means. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Is there a meal your family eats, or a ritual you repeat, that carries your family's story in it? What happens inside you when you keep it, and what would be lost if you stopped?

W2. What is the difference between remembering an event and reliving one? Have you ever kept an anniversary that felt less like recall and more like return?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Exodus 2:23 to 25 and 3:6. Israel has been enslaved for centuries and God seems silent. When God finally moves, what reason does the text give, and how does God introduce himself to Moses? What does that tell us about what the exodus actually is?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob," and at the bush he names himself by the same three names. The exodus is not a rescue improvised out of pity; it is an oath being kept, the Genesis 15 covenant coming due (God had even told Abraham about the four hundred years, 15:13). When God seems silent, the covenant is still ticking.

2. Read Exodus 4:22 to 23. What family word does God use for the entire nation of Israel, and how does that one word explain both the exodus and, soberly, the tenth plague?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Israel is my first-born son." The exodus is a Father recovering a kidnapped son from a king who enslaved him, and the demand carries its own justice: let my son go, or your firstborn is forfeit. The tenth plague is that sentence executed on a Pharaoh warned from the start. The covenant family grammar we have traced since Eden, son, household, tribe, has now been said of a whole people by God himself.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

3. You know the sentence you are hunting. Somewhere in Exodus 6:2 to 8, it appears in its fullest form yet, both halves at last. Find it and read it aloud.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 6:7: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." Possession and presence, both halves together for the first time: my people, your God. Congratulate the group; the hunt is on for the rest of Scripture, and this sentence has a long road ahead of it. Note also verse 8: the whole speech is anchored in the oath, "the land which I swore to give to Abraham."

4. Now Passover. Read Exodus 12:3 to 14 and gather the requirements as a list: what kind of lamb, what happens to it before the night, what is done with the blood, and, verse 8, what must be done with the lamb itself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A lamb without blemish; chosen for the household on the tenth day and kept until the fourteenth (12:3, 6), four days in the family's keeping; its blood put on the doorposts and lintel as the sign under which the destroyer passes over; and then the requirement most people forget: "they shall eat the flesh that night." The blood alone did not complete the rite. The sacrifice had to be consumed; the family was saved by the blood and joined to the offering by the meal. Sacrifice, in God's economy, ends in communion. Hold that principle; it never stops being true in this study.

Build, Then Press | "A Memorial Is Just a Reminder"

Here is the position at full strength, and it sounds like common sense. Exodus 12:14 calls Passover "a memorial day," and a memorial, in plain English, is a reminder: a monument, a moment of silence, a photo on the mantel. The event happened once, back there; later generations can be grateful for it, learn from it, and commemorate it, but they cannot be part of it, because time only runs one way. On this reading, every Passover after the first is a history lesson with lamb, and any talk of later generations "participating" in the exodus is pious exaggeration.

5. Reasonable, so test it against how Israel itself talks. Read Exodus 13:8: when a son asks his father about the feast, what pronouns is the father commanded to use, "them" and "they," or something else? Then read Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3, Moses speaking forty years later to a generation mostly born in the wilderness: with whom does Moses insist the covenant was made?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 13:8: "because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt," commanded speech for fathers who were never in Egypt. Deuteronomy 5:3: "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day," said to people who were not at Sinai. Israel's own liturgy refuses the "just a reminder" reading: the Hebrew *zikkaron* is a memorial that makes the saving event present so that each generation stands inside it. The Catechism states the principle straight from the Old Testament: in the liturgical celebration of these events, "they become in a certain way present and real" (CCC 1363). The steelman's common sense is modern sense; biblical memorial is thicker. File the principle carefully, because everything later in this study that stands on the word "remembrance" stands on it.

6. Read Exodus 19:3 to 6, God's proposal at Sinai. What does God ask before any of Sinai's laws are given, what does he call Israel, and, look closely at verse 5, for whose sake does the wording suggest Israel holds this office?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God proposes, "if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant," and the people will answer yes (19:8); covenant is entered, not imposed. Israel is to be "my own possession among all peoples... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." And the frame is universal: "for all the earth is mine." A priest, by definition, serves on behalf of others; a whole kingdom of priests exists on behalf of the other nations. Israel is elected for the world, not instead of it, which is exactly the shape of Abraham's third promise: in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

7. Did that priestly vocation expire with the Old Covenant? Somewhere in 1 Peter 2, the apostle quotes Sinai's job description and hands it to someone. Find the verse. Who holds the office now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

1 Peter 2:9: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," Exodus 19:6 applied to the baptized, with the same outward facing purpose: "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you." The vocation did not expire; it widened. Every baptized person in the room is inside Sinai's job description tonight.

DIG DEEPER Not a Bone Broken

Two small rubrics in Exodus 12 seem oddly specific: the lamb must be "without blemish" (12:5), and "you shall not break a bone of it" (12:46). Scripture does not waste rubrics. A perfect lamb, kept in the house, slain at twilight, eaten by the family, with not one bone broken: the Old Testament preserves these details like evidence in a sealed envelope. Keep them sealed for now, and when the study reaches its climax, open the envelope and see who the details always described.

8. Now the summit. Read Exodus 24:3 to 8 and reconstruct the ratification step by step: what is read, what do the people say, and what exactly does Moses do with the two halves of the blood? Say his sentence in verse 8 out loud, together, and remember it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The words of the LORD are read; the people vow, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do"; Moses throws half the blood against the altar, Godward, and half upon the people, binding both parties of the covenant in one blood, one shared life, one family. And the sentence: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you." Have the group say it aloud together and tell them plainly: memorize that sentence. Do not tell them why.

9. Read Exodus 24:9 to 11 slowly. Who goes up, what do they see, and what is the last thing the text says they did? Given everything this study has taught about how covenants conclude, why does this scene end the way it does?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascend; "they saw the God of Israel," a sapphire pavement under his feet; and "he did not lay his hand" on them, no one dies. The last line: "they beheld God, and ate and drank." The covenant concludes with a meal in the presence of God, because covenants make family, and family

eats together. Word, vow, blood, meal: that is covenant ratification in its fullest Old Testament form, and Israel experienced it once, on a mountain, and never forgot it. Close the night on that image: seventy elders, a sapphire floor, and supper with God.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Sinai's office, a royal priesthood for the sake of the world, now belongs to the baptized (1 Peter 2:9). Who are the "nations" in your daily orbit, the people you are positioned to stand before God for, and what would praying for them by name this week look like?

S2. Israel's memorial made the next generation say "what the LORD did for me." When you attend Mass or keep your family's faith rituals, are you attending a reminder or entering a reality? What would change if you walked in expecting participation?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this Sunday, listen for the words spoken over the chalice and simply notice what you notice. Write down one phrase afterward. Bring it next month; do not research it yet.
- Pick three people who do not know God and pray for them by name each day this week, deliberately, as a priest of 1 Peter 2:9 standing before God on their behalf.
- Before next session, read Exodus 32:1 to 29 and Deuteronomy 30:1 to 6. Watch what the people do at the foot of the mountain, and watch what God promises to do to the heart.

Closing Prayer

Father, you bound yourself to a people with words and vows, with blood on the altar and blood sprinkled upon the people, and then you set a table on the mountain and let them eat in your sight and live. We were made for that table. Keep the memory of your covenant burning in us, make our homes like the blood marked houses of Egypt, and bring us up the mountain at last. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Exodus 24:8 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Exodus 2:23 to 25 and 3:6, God remembered his covenant; the God of the fathers
- Exodus 4:22 to 23, Israel my firstborn son
- Exodus 6:2 to 8, the full covenant formula (live discovery, verse 7)
- Exodus 12:3 to 14, the Passover lamb: unblemished, housed, blood applied, flesh eaten
- Exodus 13:8 and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3, the memorial steelman texts
- Exodus 19:3 to 8, kingdom of priests and holy nation
- 1 Peter 2:9, the royal priesthood widened (live discovery)
- Exodus 24:3 to 8, word, vow, blood: behold the blood of the covenant
- Exodus 24:9 to 11, they beheld God, and ate and drank

Supporting Passages

- Genesis 15:13, the four hundred years foretold
- Exodus 12:5 and 12:46, without blemish; not a bone broken (Dig Deeper; keep sealed)
- Exodus 12:26 to 27 and 13:14, when your children ask
- CCC 1363, the memorial principle in Israel's own liturgy
- John 19:36, 1 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19, Matthew 26:28: leader only, DO NOT preview; Session 10 depends on it

SESSION 7

The Calf and the Second Law

Covenant Broken, Priesthood Narrowed, and the Law as Tutor

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Israel broke the covenant at the foot of Sinai before Moses even descended, that after the calf Levi was taken in place of Israel's consecrated firstborn and the nation's broad priestly vocation assumed a restricted, guarded form, and that the mounting law that follows is a physician's regimen and a tutor's discipline, good, holy, and deliberately incomplete, aimed at a surgery of the heart it could not itself perform.

Catholic Touchstone. The Law is holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect: like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength to fulfil it; it is a pedagogy, preparing the people for conversion and for the Gospel (CCC 1963 to 1964, Galatians 3:24).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Exodus 32 may be the most heartbreaking chapter in the Old Testament, and its timing is the point. Moses is still on the mountain receiving the covenant documents; the blood of Exodus 24 is barely dry on the people's clothes; and at the foot of Sinai, Israel melts its gold into a calf and cries, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (32:4). Israel commits idolatry during the wedding, before the honeymoon, with the ring still warm. The pattern of Eden repeats at the national scale: covenant given, covenant broken, and broken almost immediately. The group carried a question out of Session 4, what happens when the human side breaks the covenant God swore both sides of, and tonight the question stops being hypothetical.

Watch what the breach costs, institutionally. Up to this point, ancient Jewish and Christian tradition reads a broad priestly vocation running through the firstborn sons of God's family; the Passover consecrated "all the first-born" to the LORD (Exodus 13:2), and the "young men" offered the sacrifices of the covenant ratification (24:5). But in the aftermath of the calf, when Moses cries "Who is on the LORD's side?", it is the sons of Levi who rally and execute judgment, and Moses tells them, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD" (32:26 to 29). Numbers 3:11 to 13 makes the transfer official: "I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every first-born." A single priestly tribe now stands between a compromised people and the holy God. One precision, for the sharp eyed: the narrative is layered, and honesty about the layers builds trust. Aaron and his sons were designated for ministerial priesthood before the calf (Exodus 28 to 29), so it would oversimplify to say Israel's priesthood exists only because of the failure. What the text does state outright is that the Levites replace the consecrated firstborn (Numbers 3:12, "instead of every first-born"), and what the calf visibly costs is the shape of the nation's priestly vocation: the "kingdom of priests" of Exodus 19:6 takes its restricted, guarded, professionalized form, one tribe standing in for every household. Priesthood narrowed by concession: file this carefully, because the New Testament will hang an entire argument on it.

From the calf onward, the law multiplies, and the group should understand why. The moral core, the Ten Words, preceded the breach, and so, in the narrative, did the instructions for the tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 25 to 31). But the vast apparatus that unfolds after the calf in the canonical order, Leviticus entire, the purity code, the expanded priestly regulations, is given to a people who had just proven they could not be trusted with a golden earring. St. Irenaeus, in the second century, already read it this way: after the calf,

God added laws suited to a stiff necked people, harnessing their weakness, training them by repetition, like a physician prescribing a strict regimen to a patient too sick for solid food. The law is medicine and pedagogy. Deuteronomy, literally the "second law," is the covenant renewed forty years later for the next generation, and it is honest about its own insufficiency: Moses predicts the people will break it (Deuteronomy 31:16, 29).

Two texts inside the Torah itself confess that the law aims beyond the law. Deuteronomy 18:15 to 18: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you... him you shall heed," a promise Israel never stopped waiting on. And Deuteronomy 30:6, after exile is foreseen: "the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart." Note who wields the knife in that verse. In Deuteronomy 10:16 Israel was commanded to circumcise its own heart; by 30:6, God promises to do it himself, because the patient cannot perform surgery on her own heart. The law diagnoses; it cannot operate. Someone is coming who can.

Handle two hard texts honestly, because sharp participants will find them. Jesus says Moses permitted divorce "for your hardness of heart, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8): the Torah itself contains concessions, permissions calibrated to a fallen people, which the original covenant of Eden did not envision. And Ezekiel 20:25 is startling: "I gave them statutes that were not good," which the tradition has read variously, most soberly as God handing a rebellious people over to burdensome ordinances as discipline. Do not build doctrine on the debated verse; do let it confirm the honest point: the Sinai system was never presented, even by the Old Testament, as God's final word. It was scaffolding, and scaffolding is judged by the building it serves.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament's grammar for this material is pedagogy. "The law was our custodian until Christ came" (Galatians 3:24); the Greek *paidagogos* was the household slave who walked a boy to school, drilled his manners, and whose whole office expired the day the boy came of age. Paul insists in the same breath that the law is not opposed to the promises (3:21) and that it is "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12); its limitation is not moral but functional: "if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Galatians 3:21). It could command love; it could not create it.

Levi's replacement of the firstborn likewise sets up a New Testament argument the study will meet later: Hebrews 7:11 to 12 reasons that "if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood... what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek?" and concludes that "when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well." The bread and wine king from Session 4's Dig Deeper is still waiting in the wings. Leaders should see the map; participants need only feel that Levi's priesthood, born from a failure, has the word interim written on it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 4*

St. Irenaeus taught that God gave the Decalogue as the natural precepts of love, and that after the people turned to the calf, he added the further laws of bondage and discipline, adapting himself to their condition: not because God changed, but because a good physician varies the regimen with the state of the patient. For Irenaeus the whole law was one continuous act of divine patience, educating a people toward the freedom it could not yet bear.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae, First Part of the Second Part, Questions 98 to 99*

St. Thomas taught that the Old Law was good, since it repressed sin and prefigured the mysteries of Christ, but imperfect, since it could show sin without healing it and could not of itself confer the grace it prefigured, though the just of the Old Covenant were given grace through faith in the Christ to come. It stood to the New Law as the imperfect stands to the perfect, and as the schoolmaster stands to the father: everything in it was ordered, in God's intention, to Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nazianzus *Oration 31*

Explaining why God reveals gradually, St. Gregory of Nazianzus compared divine pedagogy to the training of eyes unaccustomed to light: God does not blind us with the full brightness at once but accustoms us by degrees. The first covenant cut off idols while permitting sacrifice; the second cut off sacrifice while permitting circumcision; then circumcision itself was willingly yielded, lest, forced too fast, we lose even the little we could hold (Oration 31.25 to 26). The slowness of salvation history is not reluctance; it is mercy pacing itself to the patient.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 708. This divine pedagogy appears especially in the gift of the Law, given as a "pedagogue" to lead the people toward Christ. But the Law's powerlessness to save man deprived of the divine likeness, along with the growing awareness of sin that it gives, arouses a desire for the Holy Spirit.

CCC 709. The Law, sign of the promise and of the covenant, ought to have governed the hearts and institutions of the people; but after David, Israel succumbs to the temptation of becoming a kingdom like the other nations, and the promise made to David will become the work of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1963 to 1964. The Old Law is the first stage of revealed Law: holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect. Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfil it. It is a preparation for the Gospel: a pedagogy and a prophecy of things to come.

CCC 2100. Outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must be the expression of spiritual sacrifice; the prophets of the Old Covenant often denounced sacrifices offered without inward participation. The only perfect sacrifice is the one Christ offered on the cross, and the sacrifices of the Old Law were figures pointing toward it.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Session 4's open question, what happens when the human side breaks the covenant God swore both sides of, becomes concrete tonight. Name the connection when the calf is on the table; the group carried the question here and deserves to feel it land. The answer itself still waits for Session 10.
- Thread B, blood and oath: the daily sacrificial system that now begins is Thread B institutionalized: blood every morning and evening, forever insufficient (the group will meet Hebrews 10:4 later; leader only for now). The river of blood from Sinai onward flows toward one cup.
- The priesthood thread officially opens tonight: Levi taken in place of the consecrated firstborn (Exodus 32:29, Numbers 3:11 to 13), and Israel's priestly vocation narrowed after the calf. Remember the layering: Aaron's ministerial priesthood was designated before the calf, so teach restriction and restructuring, not

the creation of priesthood from nothing. Melchizedek (Session 4 Dig Deeper) and Psalm 110:4 are waiting; Hebrews 7 is the destination. Leader only.

- The heart surgery thread opens at Deuteronomy 30:6, God will circumcise your heart, and runs straight to Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 in Session 9. Plant it firmly tonight; Session 9 harvests it.
- Thread A and Thread C hold steady (nation; Sinai/Horeb). The widening resumes in Session 8, where the chart moment finally arrives. Prepare for it this week: bring a whiteboard or large paper.
- Sealed guesses remain sealed.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants feel the timing of the calf, idolatry during the wedding, and connect it to Session 4's open question about the broken covenant.
2. Participants have traced Levi's replacement of the consecrated firstborn in the text (Exodus 13:2, 24:5, 32:26 to 29, Numbers 3:11 to 13) and the resulting narrowing of Israel's priestly vocation.
3. Participants can articulate the law as medicine and pedagogy: holy, just, good, and deliberately unable to perform the heart surgery it prescribes.
4. Participants have found Deuteronomy 18:15 and 30:6 and can say what the Torah itself is still waiting for: a prophet like Moses, and a God circumcised heart.
5. Participants have engaged the Marcionite steelman honestly and can defend the goodness of the Old Law without pretending it was the destination.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: the calf and its cost, 20 minutes; the law as pedagogy and the steelman, 20 minutes; the two waiting texts of Deuteronomy, 15 minutes, and end the night on 30:6. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q3 (the intercession of Moses) into leader narration; it is rich but the priesthood narrowing and the pedagogy material carry tonight's weight.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on Ezekiel 20:25 for home reading, and only for groups that can handle a debated text without anxiety.

SESSION 7

The Calf and the Second Law

Covenant Broken, Priesthood Narrowed, and the Law as Tutor

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, we are the people of the calf: quick to vow, quick to melt our gold, slow of heart. Thank you for not walking away at the foot of the mountain. Thank you for the long patience of the law, the medicine, the discipline, the tutor's hand. Teach us tonight what the law was for, and make us ache for the surgery only you can perform. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Think of a rule from your childhood that you resented then and understand now. What was it actually protecting or preparing you for?

W2. Why do people break promises fastest right after making them, the diet abandoned in week one, the resolution dead by February? What is that about, in us?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Exodus 32:1 to 6. Fix the timeline in your mind: where is Moses, how long has it been since the people said "all that the LORD has spoken we will do" and were sprinkled with the blood of the covenant, and what exactly do they say about the calf in verse 4? What makes the timing of this scene its most damning feature?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses is still on the mountain, receiving the covenant he just ratified; mere weeks have passed since the vow and the blood of Exodus 24. And the people credit a statue they watched being made this morning with the exodus itself: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." It is idolatry during the wedding, with the ring still warm. Now name it for the group: in Session 4 we left a question hanging over the corridor of blood, what happens when the human side breaks the covenant that God swore both sides of? It is no longer hypothetical. The human side has broken it, catastrophically, immediately. The question of what it costs the self-sworn God is now live, and this study is not done with it.

2. Read Exodus 32:7 to 14. Notice the pronouns in verse 7: whose people does God call them? And what does Moses do with God's own covenant history in verses 13 to 14? What is this scene teaching about the role of a mediator?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God says to Moses "your people, whom you brought up," as if disowning them, and offers to start over with Moses alone, a new Abraham. Moses refuses the promotion and pleads the covenant back at God: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self." He holds God to Genesis 22. And the LORD relents. This is the office of mediator in full view: one man standing in the breach (Psalm 106:23), appealing to the oath, absorbing the crisis. Israel survives the calf because somebody stood between. Keep the shape of that office in view; the study will need it.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

3. The calf costs Israel something institutional and permanent. First read Exodus 13:2 and glance back at Exodus 24:5: before the calf, who belonged to God as consecrated, and who offered the covenant sacrifices? Then read Exodus 32:26 to 29 and Numbers 3:11 to 13: after the calf, who holds the priesthood, and instead of whom?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Before: "Consecrate to me all the first-born" (13:2), and the "young men of the people of Israel" offered the ratification sacrifices (24:5); ancient Jewish and Christian tradition reads these texts as a broad priestly service running through the firstborn of every household. After: the sons of Levi, who alone rallied to Moses, are ordained "for the service of the LORD" (32:29), and Numbers 3:12 makes it statute: "I have taken the Levites... instead of every first-born." The Levites are taken for the service of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:6 to 9), while the priestly office proper remains with Aaron and his sons (Numbers 3:10). Be precise here, because the narrative is layered: Aaron's ministerial priesthood was designated before the calf (Exodus 28 to 29), so the calf did not create Israel's priesthood. What the calf visibly cost was the breadth of the vocation: the firstborn of every household give way to one tribe (Numbers 3:12 says so outright), and the "kingdom of priests" of Exodus 19:6 takes its restricted, guarded form. One tribe now stands between the people and God, and the nation's priestly vocation carries the word interim on it from that day forward.

4. From Sinai onward, the law multiplies enormously: the whole sacrificial system, the purity code, Leviticus entire. St. Irenaeus, in the second century, explained the timing: the moral core came before the calf, and the vast regulatory apparatus came after it. What is the logic of giving more law to people who just broke the law they had?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The logic of medicine and pedagogy. A patient who has just proven what she does with freedom is placed on a regimen: repetition to retrain instinct (daily sacrifice, morning and evening), quarantine from contagion (the purity code), supervised worship (the priesthood). Irenaeus's image is the physician adapting the prescription to the patient's condition; Paul's image is the *paidagogos*, the household tutor who walks the child to school until the child comes of age (Galatians 3:24). The multiplied law is not God's temper; it is God's patience, calibrated discipline for a people he refused to abandon at the foot of the mountain. (Leader note: Exodus 25 to 31, including the daily offering of 29:38 to 42, stands before the calf in the narrative; Irenaeus is reading the canonical shape, in which Leviticus's full apparatus follows the breach.)

Build, Then Press | "The God of the Old Testament Law Is Harsh, and the Law Was Bad"

This objection is ancient, it had a name by the second century, Marcion, and it deserves its strongest form because modern people feel it keenly. Look honestly at the material: executions at the foot of Sinai, a purity code that excludes the leper and the bleeding woman, animal blood morning and evening for centuries, concessions on divorce and slavery that fall visibly short of Eden, and Ezekiel himself saying "I gave them statutes that were not good" (20:25). Marcion concluded the Old Testament lawgiver could not be the Father of Jesus Christ; the modern version concludes the Old Testament God was primitive and the law regrettable. Either way the argument is the same: good gods do not write laws like these.

5. Take it seriously, then make the witnesses testify. What does Paul, apostle of grace, flatly call the law in Romans 7:12? What does Jesus say he came to do to the law in Matthew 5:17, and what does he say about why Moses permitted divorce in Matthew 19:8? And notice the standard the objection itself is using to judge the law harsh: where did we get that standard?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul: "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." Jesus: "I have come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them," and Moses allowed divorce "for your hardness of heart, but from the beginning it was not so," Jesus himself teaching that Torah contains concessions calibrated to a fallen people, measured against Eden's original. The law's severities are real, and the Church does not sand them down: they are a fallen Bronze Age nation being walked, by degrees, out of a world of child sacrifice and total war, each concession a leash shorter than the culture's and longer than the Kingdom's. And the deepest answer is the one Marcion never saw: the very standard by which we feel the law's harshness, the dignity of the leper, the equality of the woman, mercy over sacrifice, is the standard the law and the prophets themselves taught the world. The objection saws off the branch it sits on. The law was scaffolding, and you do not judge scaffolding for failing to be the cathedral; you notice that the scaffolding is exactly cathedral shaped. (Ezekiel 20:25 is genuinely debated, most soberly read as God handing the rebellious over to burdensome ordinances as discipline; be honest that the Church has not settled the verse, and build nothing on it alone.)

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. The Torah itself admits it is not the destination, twice, in Deuteronomy. First: somewhere in Deuteronomy 18:15 to 18, Moses tells Israel who to wait for. Second: in Deuteronomy 30:1 to 6, after exile is foreseen, God promises a surgery, and the crucial detail is who performs it. Compare it with the command back in Deuteronomy 10:16. Find both, and name the difference.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren, him you shall heed," a promise Israel was still actively waiting on in the first century (John 1:21, "Are you the prophet?"). And Deuteronomy 30:6: "the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart." In 10:16 Israel was commanded, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart": do it yourself. By 30:6 the surgeon has changed: God will do it, because the patient cannot operate on her own heart. The law can diagnose, command, and prepare; it cannot perform the operation. The Torah ends waiting: for a prophet like Moses, and for a God who does heart surgery. Hold both; the prophets take them up next session.

DIG DEEPER Statutes That Were Not Good?

Ezekiel 20:25 is one of the hardest verses in the prophets: "I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not have life." Readers have handled it variously: some hear grim irony; some, God handing a rebellious people over to the burdensome ordinances they preferred, as discipline (compare Romans 1:24, "God gave them up"); some, a reference to the concession laws Jesus names in Matthew 19:8. The Church has not defined the verse, so hold it with open hands. But notice what Ezekiel 20 itself does: it distinguishes the life-giving statutes God gave at Sinai (20:11) from the ordinances that were "not good" (20:25); Scripture itself can speak of layers within the law. The Church, reading the whole witness rather than this one verse, distinguishes the permanent moral law from the temporary ceremonial and disciplinary precepts ordered toward Christ (CCC 1961 to 1964). That honesty is not a weakness of Scripture; it is Scripture refusing to let anyone, then or now, mistake the tutor for the Father.

7. Step back and put the whole session in one frame. Between the calf and the end of Deuteronomy, Israel has: a broken and renewed covenant, a substitute priesthood, a daily river of sacrificial blood, a law that is holy but

cannot give life, and two standing promises, a prophet like Moses and a circumcised heart. If you were an Israelite living inside this system for centuries, what would the system itself be teaching you to want?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It would be training an ache. Every morning lamb whispers that yesterday's lamb was not enough; every priest's death (Hebrews will later note they were "prevented by death from continuing") whispers that a deathless priest is needed; every reading of Deuteronomy 30:6 whispers that the heart is still uncircumcised. The system is a pedagogy of holy dissatisfaction, deliberately incomplete, like scaffolding that makes you squint at the sky trying to imagine the finished spire. The Old Covenant's deepest gift to Israel was the shape of its own hunger. Next session, the prophets put that hunger into words: a new covenant, not like the old.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Israel broke the covenant weeks after swearing it, and God's response was patient, calibrated discipline rather than abandonment. Where has God been disciplining rather than abandoning you, and have you been reading his patience as absence?

S2. The law could command love but not create it; only grace does the heart surgery. Which command do you keep trying to white knuckle in your own strength, and what would it mean to bring it to grace instead, honestly, this week?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray Deuteronomy 30:6 as a personal petition: "Lord, circumcise my heart, so that I will love you with all my heart." Pray it slowly, and mean the scalpel.
- Identify your calf: the good thing you reach for fastest when God feels delayed. Name it out loud in prayer, and fast from it once this week.
- Before next session, read 2 Samuel 7:1 to 17 and skim Psalm 89:1 to 4 and 89:19 to 37. Watch for a wordplay on the word "house," and count what God swears to David. Bring a pen; next session we build something together.

Closing Prayer

Father, at the foot of the mountain we traded your glory for a statue, and you did not walk away. You gave us the tutor, the regimen, the daily blood, the long patience, and inside it all you planted promises: a prophet like Moses, a heart made new by your own hand. Keep the ache alive in us that the law was built to teach, and bring us to the surgeon. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

Deuteronomy 30:6 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 7

The Calf and the Second Law

Covenant Broken, Priesthood Narrowed, and the Law as Tutor

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Exodus 32:1 to 6, the calf; the timing
- Exodus 32:7 to 14, Moses in the breach; Remember Abraham (with Psalm 106:23)
- Exodus 13:2 and 24:5, priesthood of the firstborn before the calf (live discovery, part 1)
- Exodus 32:26 to 29 and Numbers 3:11 to 13, the Levites instead of the firstborn (live discovery, part 2)
- Galatians 3:21, 3:24 and Romans 7:12, the tutor; holy, just, and good
- Matthew 5:17 and 19:8, fulfil not abolish; for your hardness of heart (steelman)
- Deuteronomy 18:15 to 18, a prophet like Moses (live discovery)
- Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1 to 6, circumcise your heart; God will circumcise your heart (live discovery)

Supporting Passages

- Deuteronomy 31:16 and 31:29, Moses predicts the breach
- Ezekiel 20:25, statutes that were not good (Dig Deeper; debated, hold with open hands)
- Romans 1:24, God gave them up (comparison for the hard reading)
- John 1:21, Are you the prophet? (the wait still live in the first century)
- Hebrews 7:11 to 12 and 10:4, the interim priesthood; leader only, do not preview
- Psalm 110:4, a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (leader only; the thread from Session 4)

SESSION 8

A House Forever

David, the Sworn Kingdom, and the Chart the Group Builds Themselves

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7, where the covenant formula personalizes onto a king ("I will be his father, and he shall be my son"), meet the office of the queen mother, watch the second promise of Genesis 12 become a sworn covenant, and, in the session's centerpiece, build the mediator chart themselves and see the shape of salvation history with their own eyes.

Catholic Touchstone. When God gives David the promise of a house and a kingdom that shall be made sure for ever, the hope of Israel is fixed on the son of David; the Church confesses that promise kept in Christ the Lord, anointed priest, prophet, and king (CCC 436, 709, 2579).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Roughly two centuries separate Deuteronomy from David: conquest, the anarchic spiral of Judges ("every man did what was right in his own eyes"), and the people's demand for a king "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5), a request the text treats as a rejection of God's kingship even as God works through it. Saul is the king the people wanted; David, the shepherd boy anointed in Bethlehem, is "a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). By 2 Samuel 5 to 6, David has united the tribes, taken the Jebusite stronghold of Zion, made Jerusalem his capital, and brought the ark of the covenant up the mountain with dancing. The geography matters: the ark now rests in the hill country of Moriah (Genesis 22:2 calls it "the land of Moriah"; 2 Chronicles 3:1 places Solomon's temple on Mount Moriah, the ridge just above the City of David), the very region where a father once said "the LORD will provide." The mountains of this study are converging on one city.

2 Samuel 7 turns on a wordplay the group must catch. David, at rest in his cedar palace, proposes to build God a house, a temple, since the ark still sits in a tent. God's answer through Nathan runs the word back at him: "the LORD will make you a house" (7:11), not a building but a dynasty. David offers architecture; God counters with genealogy. And the terms (7:12 to 16) are staggering: an offspring raised up after David, a kingdom established, a throne "for ever," and then the sentence the group has been trained to hear: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (7:14). The covenant formula, which embraced a people at Sinai ("my people... your God"), now lands on a single royal person. The corporate sonship of Exodus 4:22 concentrates onto one man: the king carries the covenant in his body. When the group's formula radar goes off here, and it will, name what has happened: the formula has personalized.

Chapter 7 never uses the word covenant, but Scripture elsewhere insists on it and adds the crucial verb: "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants for ever" (Psalm 89:3 to 4), and "The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne" (Psalm 132:11). Sworn. The second promise of Genesis 12, the great name and royal line, has now been upgraded to a covenant under oath, exactly as the first promise (nationhood) was sworn at Sinai. The group's written list from Session 4 now has two of its three promises covenant sealed; tonight they should mark it physically. One promise remains: all the families of the earth.

Two features of the Davidic monarchy deserve special attention because they become permanent fixtures of messianic hope. First, the kingdom is international in horizon: Psalm 72, the coronation psalm of the Davidic

house, prays that the king's dominion run "from sea to sea," that "all kings fall down before him," and then, unmistakably, in verse 17, echoes Genesis 12:3 verbatim in substance: "may all nations be blessed in him." Israel's own liturgy connected the Davidic king to Abraham's third promise: the worldwide blessing would arrive through the son of David. Second, the kingdom has a distinctive office: the *gebirah*, the queen mother. Because kings had many wives but one mother, the queen of the Davidic court was the king's mother, not his wife: Bathsheba is seated on a throne at Solomon's right hand, and the king rises and bows to her (1 Kings 2:19); the books of Kings name the queen mother in the royal formulas of Judah again and again; Jeremiah 13:18 addresses "the king and the queen mother" as the two crowned heads. Be honest about the famous scene's outcome: Solomon in fact refuses Bathsheba's petition in 1 Kings 2, because Adonijah's request was a bid for the throne; the office of intercessor is real and honored, and no king, then or now, grants a treasonous request. Precision here builds credibility. The office matters because when the kingdom returns, so does the office; file the *gebirah* until the study's final session.

And then, honesty about the wreckage: Solomon's golden age curdles into idolatry, the kingdom splits in 930 BC, the northern tribes are erased by Assyria in 722, and in 587 Babylon burns the temple, blinds the last reigning son of David, and drags the dynasty into exile. For more than five centuries after the return, no son of David sits on any throne. Psalm 89, the very psalm that celebrates the sworn covenant, ends by hurling the wreckage at heaven: "Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?" (89:49). The Old Testament does not flinch from the contradiction between the oath and the rubble, and neither should the group. That tension is exactly where tonight's steelman lives.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament opens by answering Psalm 89's anguish in its first sentence: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1), the two sworn covenants named in one breath. At the Annunciation, Gabriel's words to Mary are 2 Samuel 7 nearly clause for clause: "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" (Luke 1:32 to 33). The angel is quoting the covenant. And the personalized formula of 2 Samuel 7:14, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son," is applied to Christ explicitly in Hebrews 1:5. The New Testament's very grammar for Jesus, Christ, Messiah, Anointed One, Son of David, Son of God, is Davidic covenant vocabulary.

The queen mother thread likewise crosses the testaments quietly: Elizabeth's greeting, "why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43), echoes court language, since "my lord" is how one addresses the Davidic king (cf. 2 Samuel 24:21); Catholic interpreters have long heard in it the honored address to the *gebirah* of the newly announced kingdom, and Revelation 12 will show a woman crowned with twelve stars, mother of the male child who is to rule all the nations and who is caught up to God's throne. Leaders should know the destination; participants meet it fully in Session 12. Tonight, plant the office and let it wait.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 3*

St. Irenaeus insisted, against those who split Jesus from Israel's story, that the Son of God was truly born of the seed of David according to the flesh, because the promises were made to David and had to be kept in a son of David's own line: God's fidelity to the dynasty is part of the gospel itself, and the genealogies are not decoration but proof of a kept oath.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 17*

St. Augustine read 2 Samuel 7 with a lawyer's care: the promise of a house and throne "for ever" was manifestly not exhausted by Solomon, whose temple fell and whose line lost the crown; therefore the oath, being God's, must look beyond Solomon to a Son of David whose kingdom cannot end. For Augustine the very wreckage of the earthly monarchy was evidence that the promise was always aimed higher.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother*

St. Bernard, the last of the Fathers in spirit, preached the royal dignity of the Virgin from the logic of the kingdom itself: the mother of the King reigns beside her Son not by grasping but by gift, and her whole office is to intercede, to present petitions, and to point to him. What Israel's court gave the queen mother in figure, Bernard taught, heaven gives the mother of the true Son of David in fullness.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 436. The word Christ comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, which means anointed. Israel's kings were anointed, as were priests and, on occasion, prophets. Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king.

CCC 709. The Law, sign of promise and covenant, ought to have governed the people; after David, Israel succumbs to the temptation of becoming a kingdom like the other nations. But the kingdom, object of the promise made to David, will be the work of the Holy Spirit; it will belong to the poor according to the Spirit.

CCC 2579. David is par excellence the king "after God's own heart," the shepherd who prays for his people and prays in their name, whose submission to the will of God, whose praise, and whose repentance, will be a model for the prayer of the people. His prayer is a faithful adherence to the divine promise and expresses a loving and joyful trust in God, the only King and Lord.

CCC 64. Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts. The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- **TONIGHT IS THE CHART.** Bring a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper. The mediator chart (Q7) is the session's centerpiece and one of the study's two great reveals; the group builds it, you only scribe. Rehearse the mechanics in advance and protect 20 minutes for it.
- The chart's final row stays blank tonight: after "David, kingdom," draw one empty row with a question mark in every column. Do not fill it. Do not hint. The blank row does the work of ten lectures.
- The covenant formula personalizes tonight: 2 Samuel 7:14, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." When the group's radar fires, confirm it and name the development: the formula that covered a nation now lands on one royal man who carries the covenant in his body.
- The written list of the three promises (Session 4) gets its second checkmark tonight: promise two, the great name and kingdom, sworn to David (Psalm 89:3 to 4, 132:11). Promise one was sworn at Sinai. Have them

physically mark it, and let them stare at the one promise remaining: all the families of the earth. Say nothing more.

- The gebirah is planted tonight and harvested in Session 12. Luke 1:43 is quoted in the leader materials only; do not bring it to the group yet.
- Thread C, the mountain: Zion. David brings the ark up the ridge of Moriah's hill country; Psalm 2:6, "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill." Fifth summit. The mountains are converging on one city.
- Sealed guesses: SEALED, one more session. Some participants will visibly connect the blank chart row to their guess. Smile, confirm nothing.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have caught the house wordplay of 2 Samuel 7 and can state the exchange: David offers architecture, God counters with dynasty.
2. Participants heard the covenant formula personalize onto the king (7:14) and understood the development from national to royal sonship.
3. Participants have verified from Psalm 89 and Psalm 132 that the Davidic promise is a sworn covenant, and marked promise two on their Session 4 list.
4. Participants built the mediator chart themselves and saw the widening shape of salvation history with their own eyes, ending at a blank row.
5. Participants met the office of the queen mother with historical precision, and engaged the exile steelman honestly through Psalm 89's own anguish.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 58 minutes: 2 Samuel 7 close reading, 18 minutes; the sworn oath and promise checklist, 8; the gebirah, 8; the steelman, 12; and the chart, 20, protected at all costs, with the blank row as the final image. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q1 (from Judges to David) into two minutes of leader narration.
- If running long: If the night runs long, trim the gebirah discussion (Q6) to five minutes and a promise that the office returns at the end of the study; never trim the chart.

SESSION 8

A House Forever

David, the Sworn Kingdom, and the Chart the Group Builds Themselves

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, you took a shepherd boy from the flock and swore him a house that outlasts every dynasty on earth. You keep oaths across centuries as if they were minutes. Tonight, let us see the shape of what you have been building since Eden, and give us the patience of David, who heard your promise and sat down before you in wonder. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. What is something your family has been building for more than one generation, a business, a farm, a tradition, a reputation? What does it feel like to hold something you did not start and will not finish?

W2. If you could be certain of one promise about your descendants a century from now, what would you want it to be?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Set the scene: two centuries of conquest and chaos, a demanded king who failed, and now David: tribes united, Zion taken, the ark carried up to Jerusalem with dancing (2 Samuel 6). Read 2 Samuel 7:1 to 3. What does David propose, and why is it, on its face, the most pious idea anyone has had in the whole book?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

David, at rest in a cedar palace, is embarrassed that the ark of God still sits in a tent, and proposes to build God a house, a temple. It is gratitude, piety, and good order; even Nathan initially blesses it. Which makes what happens next one of the great reversals in Scripture: God declines the offer and flips it.

2. Read 2 Samuel 7:4 to 11 and catch the wordplay God builds the whole oracle on. David wanted to build God a house. What does God say he will do instead, and what does the word house mean in each direction?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"The LORD will make you a house" (7:11). David meant a building; God means a dynasty. David offers architecture, God counters with genealogy: not a house of cedar for the ark but a house of sons for the throne. The gift always runs downhill in covenant history: David, like Abram at the cutting ceremony of Genesis 15, where only God passed between the pieces, is made to receive. Note verse 5's gentle irony: "Would you build me a house to dwell in?", as if the Maker of heaven needed a contractor.

3. Now read 2 Samuel 7:12 to 16 slowly. List the terms of the promise, and, verse 14, be ready: your formula radar should go off. What sentence do you hear, and what has changed about it since Exodus 6:7?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The terms: an offspring raised up from David's body; a kingdom established; a throne "for ever"; discipline when the son sins, but steadfast love never removed as it was from Saul; house, kingdom, and throne "made sure for ever." And verse 14: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." The covenant formula, which at the exodus covered a whole nation (my people, your God), has personalized onto a single royal person. The corporate sonship of "Israel is my first-born son" (Exodus 4:22) now concentrates onto one man: the Davidic king carries the covenant of the entire people in his own body. When the king stands before God, Israel stands before God. Remember this architecture; everything messianic depends on it.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

4. 2 Samuel 7 never actually uses the word covenant, so check the claim: is this a covenant, and is it sworn? Two witnesses: somewhere in Psalm 89:1 to 4 and somewhere in Psalm 132:11. Find the verbs.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Psalm 89:3 to 4: "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants for ever." Psalm 132:11: "The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne." Covenant, sworn, irreversible. Now have everyone pull out the list of three promises they wrote in Session 4 and mark it: promise one, nationhood, sworn at Sinai; promise two, the great name and royal house, sworn tonight to David. Two down. Let them look at the third, all the families of the earth, and say nothing.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. Does Israel's own worship connect the Davidic king to that third promise? Psalm 72 is a coronation psalm of the Davidic house. Skim verses 8 to 11, then read verse 17 aloud, and set it beside Genesis 12:3 from memory. What has Israel's liturgy done?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Psalm 72 prays that the king's dominion run from sea to sea, that all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him, and then verse 17: "May his name endure for ever... May men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed!" The Hebrew is the very blessing formula of Genesis 12:3, which the ancient Greek translation and many versions render "may all nations be blessed in him." That is Genesis 12:3 sung over a Davidic head. Israel's own liturgy taught that Abraham's third promise, the worldwide blessing, would arrive through the son of David. The two sworn covenants are already holding hands in the psalter and reaching together toward the one promise still unsworn.

6. One office of this kingdom needs introducing, because it becomes permanent furniture. Davidic kings had many wives but only one mother, so the queen of Judah's court was the queen mother, the *gebirah*. Read 1 Kings 2:19 to 20, and note also that Jeremiah 13:18 addresses "the king and the queen mother" as the realm's two crowned heads. What honors does Solomon pay Bathsheba, and, being precise, does he grant the petition she carries?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The king rises to meet his mother, bows down to her, and has a throne set for her at his right hand, and he says "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you." The office is real: enthroned, honored, the recognized intercessor who brings petitions to the king. And then precision, because it builds credibility:

Solomon in fact refuses this particular petition, because Adonijah's request for the late king's companion was a veiled bid for the throne, treason dressed as romance. The office of intercessor is honored; a treasonous petition is still denied, as it should be. Hold onto the office itself: one mother, enthroned at the right hand of the son of David, presenting petitions. When the kingdom returns, the study will ask whether the office returned with it.

Build, Then Press | "The Davidic Covenant Failed"

This objection has the advantage of being made first by the Bible itself, so give it full voice. God swore a house, kingdom, and throne "for ever." History answered: Solomon's idolatry, the kingdom torn in two in 930 BC, the north annihilated by Assyria in 722, and in 587 the unthinkable: Babylon burns the temple, executes the princes, blinds Zedekiah the last reigning son of David, and ends the monarchy. For the next four centuries and more, no son of David sits on any throne anywhere. Psalm 89 itself, after forty verses celebrating the sworn covenant, turns and hurls the wreckage at heaven: "you have renounced the covenant with your servant... Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?" (89:39, 49). The steelman simply agrees with the psalmist's evidence: the oath, on any plain reading, died in the rubble of 587 BC.

7. Do not soften the evidence; sit in it, as Israel had to for six hundred years. Then press three questions. First, within the promise itself: 2 Samuel 7:14 to 15 anticipated the sons' sins and named the consequence, discipline "with the rod of men," while swearing one thing would never be removed: what? Second, what do the prophets do with the dynasty during and after the exile, check Isaiah 11:1 and Ezekiel 34:23 to 24? Third, when the New Testament opens, at a moment when the house of David is a carpenter's family in a hill town, what does the angel say to a virgin betrothed to a son of David (Luke 1:32 to 33)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First: the covenant itself distinguished discipline from abandonment; thrones can be suspended and sons chastised "with the rod of men," but "my steadfast love will not depart from him." Exile falls within the covenant's own terms as discipline, not annulment. Second: the prophets, staring at the stump, promise a shoot: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1), and God pledges "my servant David shall be prince among them" (Ezekiel 34:23 to 24) to a generation for whom David was four centuries dead, which is only coherent as a promise of a coming Davidide. The hope did not die in 587; it sharpened into messianism, which is simply the Davidic covenant refusing to stay buried. Third: Gabriel's words to Mary are 2 Samuel 7 quoted back almost clause for clause: "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end." The New Testament's first chapters are a covenant lawyer's brief: the genealogy (Matthew 1:1, son of David, son of Abraham), the angel's citation, the Bethlehem birthplace. The steelman reads the oath as ending at the rubble; Scripture reads the rubble as the covenant's dark passage to a throne no Babylon can burn. And note the honest cost of that answer: it means the "for ever" was always aimed at a Son who cannot die, which is to say, the objection is right that no merely mortal dynasty could carry this oath. The wreckage of 587 did not refute the promise; it revealed its true size, exactly as St. Augustine argued.

8. THE CHART. (Leader: whiteboard up, three columns: Covenant Mediator, Sign or Seal, Scope of the Family. You scribe; the group supplies every entry from memory, with their Bibles and Take-Homes open if needed.) Walk back through the whole study, session by session, and fill the rows: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. For each: who was the mediator, what sealed or signed it, and, the column that matters most, how big was the covenant family? When the five rows are filled, draw one more empty row at the bottom, put a question mark in each column, and stop. What do you all see?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The rows, roughly as the group will build them: Adam, sign of the Sabbath, scope of a marriage, one couple. Noah, the bow in the clouds, a household. Abraham, circumcision and the oath of Moriah, a tribe. Moses, Passover and the blood of Sinai, a nation. David, the sworn throne, a kingdom gathering nations under it (Psalm 72). Then the blank row. Let the group say what they see, and they will: the family widens every single time, couple, household, tribe, nation, kingdom, and the sequence has one obvious next word that no covenant has yet delivered, and one promise from Session 4's list still unsworn, all the families of the earth. Resist every temptation to complete the row. Some of them will be visibly thinking about the guess they sealed in week one; confirm nothing, smile, and tell them: bring your Take-Home 1 in two weeks. Then close.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. David wanted to build for God and had to learn to receive instead, and his response was to go in and sit before the LORD (2 Samuel 7:18). Where are you busy building for God something he may be waiting to build in you, and what would sitting down before him look like this week?

S2. The exile taught Israel to hold God's oath and life's rubble in the same hands without dropping either. What rubble are you currently holding next to a promise of God, and what would Psalm 89's kind of honesty, worship that argues, sound like in your prayer?

Live It This Week

- Pray 2 Samuel 7:18 once this week the way David did: go somewhere quiet, sit down before the LORD, and begin "Who am I, O Lord GOD... that you have brought me thus far?" Then just list what he has built in your life that you did not build.
- Read Psalm 89 in one sitting, all of it, and do not skip the dark ending. Let it teach you that covenant faith is allowed to say "where is your steadfast love?" out loud.
- Before next session, read Hosea 2:14 to 23 and Jeremiah 31:31 to 34. Watch what God calls the broken covenant relationship, and watch for our formula, badly wounded and still alive. And find your Take-Home 1; you will need it soon.

Closing Prayer

Father, you make houses out of shepherds and thrones out of oaths. We have seen the shape of your plan tonight, a family growing wider with every promise, and we confess we do not yet see its end. Give us David's wonder, the exile's patience, and the psalmist's honest voice, and when we cannot see the throne, let us trust the oath. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

2 Samuel 7:16 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 8

A House Forever

David, the Sworn Kingdom, and the Chart the Group Builds Themselves

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- 2 Samuel 7:1 to 3, David's proposal
- 2 Samuel 7:4 to 11, the house wordplay reversed
- 2 Samuel 7:12 to 16, the terms; verse 14, the formula personalizes
- Psalm 89:3 to 4 and Psalm 132:11, covenant and sworn oath (live discovery)
- Psalm 72:8 to 11 and 72:17, all nations blessed in him, Genesis 12:3 sung over the king (live discovery)
- 1 Kings 2:19 to 20 and Jeremiah 13:18, the gebirah, honored and precise
- Psalm 89:38 to 51, the covenant and the rubble (steelman)
- Isaiah 11:1 and Ezekiel 34:23 to 24, the stump and the shoot; my servant David (steelman)
- Luke 1:32 to 33 and Matthew 1:1, the oath cited at the Annunciation (steelman resolution)
- THE CHART: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, blank row

Supporting Passages

- 1 Samuel 8:5 and 13:14, a king like the nations; a man after God's own heart
- 2 Samuel 5 to 6, Zion taken, the ark ascends; Psalm 2:6, my king on Zion
- Exodus 4:22 with 2 Samuel 7:14, corporate sonship concentrated on the king
- 2 Samuel 7:18, David sits before the LORD
- Hebrews 1:5, the formula of 7:14 applied to Christ (leader only)
- Luke 1:43, the mother of my Lord (gebirah echo; leader only, Session 12 material)

SESSION 9

A New Covenant I Will Make

Hosea's Marriage, the Exile, and the Promise of a Heart Made New

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants hear the covenant formula spoken in reverse ("you are not my people and I am not your God") and discover that even God's divorce language carries a wedding inside it; they find the only Old Testament passage that says "new covenant" and learn its terms: law written on hearts, everyone knowing the LORD, and sins remembered no more.

Catholic Touchstone. Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, and written on their hearts (CCC 64). The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit, the covenant Jeremiah announced (CCC 1965).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The prophets are covenant lawyers. When Israel and Judah rot from within, God does not send philosophers; he files suit. The prophetic *rib*, the covenant lawsuit, summons heaven and earth as witnesses (Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:1 to 2, the very witnesses of Deuteronomy 30:19) and reads the indictment: idolatry, injustice, blood. Exile, when it falls, is not divine abandonment but the covenant's own sanctions executed, the curses of Deuteronomy 28 arriving on schedule. This matters pastorally: Israel in Babylon is not a people whose God lost, but a son under the discipline the covenant itself specified, and, as Session 8 showed, discipline was never abandonment.

Hosea is the covenant lawsuit made flesh. God commands the prophet to marry Gomer, a woman who will break his heart, so that Hosea's marriage becomes a living parable of God's marriage to Israel. The children's names are the verdict, and the third is the most terrible sentence in the prophets: *Lo-ammi*, "for you are not my people and I am not your God" (Hosea 1:9). Hear what that is: the covenant formula, the sentence this study is named for, spoken in reverse. The vow of Genesis 17 and Exodus 6 is turned inside out; this is judgment language as shattering as a divorce decree, communion ruptured. Yet even this sentence is not an annulment: the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). And then Hosea 2 does what only God does: the aggrieved husband plans not an execution but an elopement, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her... and there she shall answer as in the days of her youth" (2:14 to 15), a second exodus, a second honeymoon, "you will call me My husband" (2:16), and the formula resurrected: "I will say to Not my people, You are my people; and he shall say, You are my God" (2:23). Even God's divorce papers have a wedding invitation hidden inside them.

Jeremiah watches the sanctions fall: 587 BC, the temple burned, the covenant institutions, king, priesthood, sacrifice, land, all rubble. And it is exactly there, in the book's darkest stretch, that the Old Testament says something it says nowhere else: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers... my covenant which they broke" (Jeremiah 31:31 to 32). This is the only occurrence of the phrase new covenant in the entire Old Testament; when anyone, ever, says those words, they are quoting this passage. Its terms answer every failure the study has catalogued: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts" (the tutor's external law internalized at last); "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (the formula, restored and made permanent); "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (immediacy, not only mediation); "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (the

one thing no bull or goat ever accomplished). Notice what Jeremiah does not say: how. The promise has no mechanism, no price tag, no visible means. It is a check written against a deposit no one can see. Yet.

Ezekiel, prophet among the exiles, adds the surgical detail Deuteronomy 30:6 promised: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:25 to 27), and the formula again, "you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (36:28). Water, heart, Spirit: the group that discovered 1 Peter 3:21 in Session 3 will feel the shape of this without prompting. And Ezekiel 37's dry bones make the same promise at national scale: a people dead in exile raised by the *ruach*, the breath that hovered over creation's waters (Genesis 1:2) and blew over the flood (Genesis 8:1).

One more prophetic thread must be secured tonight because the steelman depends on it: the prophets universalize. Isaiah sees "the mountain of the house of the LORD... raised above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it" (Isaiah 2:2 to 3); the Servant is given as "a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6); foreigners who hold the covenant will be brought to the holy mountain, "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:6 to 7). The exile scattered Israel among the nations, and the prophets, astonishingly, begin to read the scattering as seed. The third promise of Genesis 12 is stirring.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament claims this material by name and quotes it at length. Hebrews 8:8 to 12 cites Jeremiah 31:31 to 34 in full, the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, and Hebrews 10:16 to 17 returns to it, treating "I will remember their sin no more" as the charter of Christian forgiveness. Paul and Peter both seize Hosea's reversal for the Gentiles: "Those who were not my people I will call my people... and in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people, they will be called sons of the living God" (Romans 9:25 to 26, quoting Hosea), and "Once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10). The apostles read *Lo-ammi* as the world's condition, and its reversal as the world's invitation.

Where and how the new covenant is enacted, by whom, at what price, through what words, is the single question this session must leave unanswered. Jeremiah wrote the check; next session the group watches it cashed, and they must arrive with the promise ringing in their ears and no spoilers in them. The leader's discipline this week is total: no Last Supper references, no "new covenant in my blood," nothing. Next session also opens the sealed guesses; remind everyone, as the last word of the night, to bring Take-Home 1.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome *Prologue to the Commentary on Isaiah*

St. Jerome, who gave his life to the Hebrew Scriptures in his cave at Bethlehem, taught that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (Prologue to the Commentary on Isaiah), and across his commentaries on the prophets he read them as men standing on the ridgeline of history: one foot in the ruin of their own day, one foot in the daybreak they could see but not date. Their sorrow was for the present covenant broken; their joy was for the covenant coming, which they served without living to see.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *On the Spirit and the Letter*

St. Augustine built his whole account of grace on Jeremiah 31. The difference between the old covenant and the new, he taught, is the difference between the law written on stone, standing outside a man and accusing him, and the law written on the heart by the Holy Spirit, moving a man from within so that he loves what God

commands. The letter demands; the Spirit gives what the letter demands. That, for Augustine, is the entire gospel in one prophetic sentence.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 4*

St. Irenaeus insisted that the same God gave both covenants, the old adapted to a people in training, the new bestowing the Spirit and liberty, and that the prophets themselves announced the change: the God of Israel was not replaced but was keeping, in the new covenant, the very promises the old covenant carried in figure. Novelty without discontinuity: the heir is new, the estate is ancient.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 218 to 219. Israel came to know that God's love was the reason for its election and deliverance, a love stronger than a mother's for her children or a bridegroom's for his bride; God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved, a love which will be victorious over even the worst infidelities.

CCC 64. Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts. The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations.

CCC 1611. Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage; the books of Ruth and Tobit and above all the Song of Songs bear witness to this, and the tradition has read them in the light of the covenant.

CCC 1965. The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law. It is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount; it is also the work of the Holy Spirit, the interior law "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts," the covenant announced by Jeremiah.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- The formula thread reaches its crisis tonight: Hosea 1:9 speaks it in reverse (not my people, not your God), and Hosea 2:23, Jeremiah 31:33, and Ezekiel 36:28 resurrect it. Let the group feel the near death; the formula's final utterance (Revelation 21:3) is three sessions of silence away.
- The heart surgery thread (Deuteronomy 30:6, Session 7) is harvested tonight: Jeremiah writes the law on the heart, Ezekiel transplants it. Name the connection back to Session 7 explicitly; the group planted it and deserves the harvest.
- Thread B, blood and oath: conspicuously ABSENT from Jeremiah 31, and that absence is the session's cliffhanger. The new covenant promises total forgiveness and names no sacrifice, no blood, no mechanism. Point at the hole; do not fill it. Session 10 fills it.
- Thread C, the mountain: Isaiah 2:2 to 3, the mountain of the LORD raised above all hills with all nations streaming to it. Sixth summit, and the first one every nation climbs.

- **CRITICAL SPOILER DISCIPLINE:** no Last Supper, no Matthew 26:28, no Luke 22:20, no Upper Room references of any kind tonight. The entire architecture of Session 10 depends on the group meeting those words fresh with Jeremiah 31 and Exodus 24:8 already in their ears.
- Last word of the night, non negotiable: everyone brings Take-Home 1, sealed guess intact, next session. Send a reminder midweek.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants understand exile as covenant lawsuit and executed sanctions, discipline within the covenant rather than abandonment of it.
2. Participants have heard the covenant formula spoken in reverse at Hosea 1:9 and watched it resurrected at Hosea 2:23.
3. Participants have located the Old Testament's only "new covenant" passage and can list its four terms from Jeremiah 31:33 to 34.
4. Participants have connected Ezekiel 36:25 to 28 (water, heart, Spirit) back to Deuteronomy 30:6 and forward, on their own, to the shape of baptism.
5. Participants have seen the prophets universalize the promise (Isaiah 2, 49, 56) and can answer the "Israel and Judah only" objection from the prophets themselves.
6. Participants leave with the cliffhanger intact: the new covenant names no price and no mechanism, and they are bringing Take-Home 1 next week.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: Hosea deserves 18 (the reversed formula must land emotionally, not just intellectually), Jeremiah 31 gets 18 (read it twice, list the terms, find the hole), Ezekiel and the universal texts share 12, steelman 7. Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer, and the Take-Home 1 reminder, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress the covenant lawsuit background (Q1) into three minutes of leader framing.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the dry bones for home reading.

SESSION 9

A New Covenant I Will Make

Hosea's Marriage, the Exile, and the Promise of a Heart Made New

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, when we broke the covenant, you filed suit, and when the verdict came, you served the sentence with us, into exile, into the wilderness, still speaking tenderly. Tonight let us hear the worst sentence in Scripture and the wedding hidden inside it, and make our hearts ache for the new covenant you promised, written not on stone but on us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Has anyone ever kept loving you through something that should have ended the relationship? What did their refusal to quit do to you, over time?

W2. What is the difference between a rule you follow because it is posted and one you follow because it has become who you are? How does something make that journey from outside to inside?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. The prophets open like lawyers, not poets. Read Micah 6:1 to 2 and Isaiah 1:2. Who is summoned as witnesses, and where has this study seen those witnesses before? What does that tell us about what exile actually is when it falls?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Heaven and earth, the mountains, the foundations: the exact witnesses Moses invoked when the covenant was sworn (Deuteronomy 30:19, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day"). The prophets are recalling the witnesses to testify at a covenant lawsuit, the *rib*. Which means exile, when the verdict falls, is not God losing or leaving; it is the covenant's own sanctions (Deuteronomy 28) being executed, discipline the document itself specified. Israel in Babylon is under discipline, not abandonment, the very logic God declared over David's son: "I will chasten him with the rod of men... but I will not take my steadfast love from him" (2 Samuel 7:14 to 15). What God promised the royal house, the exile of that house now enacts for the nation: chastened, never orphaned.

2. Now Hosea, where the lawsuit becomes a marriage. God commands the prophet to marry a woman who will be unfaithful, and to name the children as verdicts. Read Hosea 1:2 to 9 and stop hard at verse 9. You have been hunting a sentence through this entire study. What has just happened to it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Call his name Not my people (*Lo-ammi*), for you are not my people and I am not your God." The covenant formula, the vow of Genesis 17:7 and Exodus 6:7, the sentence this study is named for, has been spoken in reverse. This is language as terrible as a divorce decree, the wedding vow of Sinai turned into a verdict; know as leader that the covenant God cannot finally revoke his own gifts (Romans 11:29). Let the room feel it before moving on: after nine sessions of watching God say I will be your God, God has just said I am not. Some silence is appropriate here.

3. Read Hosea 2:14 to 16 and 2:23. The wronged husband announces his response to the adultery. What does he plan, where does he take her, what era does he deliberately recreate, and what happens to the dead formula in verse 23?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He plans an allurement, not an execution: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." The wilderness is deliberate: the honeymoon terrain of the exodus, "as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt." God's answer to the broken marriage is a second exodus and a second courtship: "you will call me My husband." And verse 23 resurrects the formula from the dead: "I will say to Not my people, You are my people; and he shall say, You are my God." Even God's divorce papers have a wedding invitation folded inside them. The covenant lawsuit ends in renewed vows, because the plaintiff cannot stop loving the defendant.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

4. Now the night's summit. Somewhere in Jeremiah 31:31 to 34 the Old Testament says something it says in no other place, two words together, for the only time. Find the phrase, then read the whole passage aloud, slowly, and list the terms of what God promises, item by item.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a NEW COVENANT," the only occurrence of that phrase in the entire Old Testament; whoever says those two words, ever, anywhere, is quoting this text. The terms: (1) "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts," the tutor's external law finally internalized, Session 7's ache answered; (2) "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," the formula, restored and permanent; (3) "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," immediate knowledge of God for every member; (4) "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," full and final forgiveness, the thing no morning lamb ever achieved. Have the group write the four terms down next to their three promises from Session 4. This is now the most important unfulfilled promise in their Bibles.

5. Read the passage once more and now hunt for what is NOT there. The new covenant promises the complete forgiveness of sins. Everything this study has taught about covenants, from the corridor of blood to behold the blood of the covenant, says forgiveness and covenant making have a price. What price does Jeremiah name? What mechanism? What sacrifice?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

None. Search it: no blood, no altar, no lamb, no priest, no mechanism of any kind. Jeremiah writes a check for the largest sum in the Old Testament, sins remembered no more, against a deposit nobody can see. The covenant story has run in blood since the garments of skins: Noah's altar, the corridor of Genesis 15, Moriah, the doorposts of Egypt, the basins of Sinai. This covenant is announced with the price line blank. That blank is the cliffhanger of the entire Old Testament. Do not resolve it. Tell the group plainly: the answer to how exists, it is one sentence long, and they will find it themselves next session. Tonight we sit with the promissory note.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Ezekiel, prophet among the exiles, supplies the surgical details. Read Ezekiel 36:24 to 28 and gather three things God says he will use or give, in order, and then check verse 28 for a sentence you know. And one

memory test: which promise from Session 7 is being kept here, and who did we say would have to hold the scalpel?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Water ("I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean"), a heart ("a new heart I will give you... I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh"), and the Spirit ("I will put my spirit within you"). Verse 28: "you shall be my people, and I will be your God," the formula again. And this is Deuteronomy 30:6 being kept: the LORD your God will circumcise your heart, God holding the scalpel himself, exactly as the group discovered two sessions ago, because the patient cannot operate on her own heart. Water, heart, Spirit: if anyone in the room quietly thinks of a font, let them think it; confirm nothing and keep moving.

Build, Then Press | "The New Covenant Was Promised to Israel and Judah, Not to the Church"

Read Jeremiah 31:31 again and give this objection its full force, because it stands on the plain text: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Not with Gentiles, not with a future international Church: with the two named houses of the divided kingdom. On this reading, held seriously by dispensationalist interpreters, the Church's claim on Jeremiah 31 is a case of reading someone else's mail; the new covenant belongs to ethnic Israel, and Christians who claim its forgiveness clause are quoting a contract they never signed.

7. The addressees are real; do not erase them. But press the prophets themselves, because the objection quotes one verse of men who wrote whole books. What do the exile prophets say the nations will do at the mountain of the LORD (Isaiah 2:2 to 3)? What scope does God assign the Servant's work in Isaiah 49:6, and is he satisfied with Israel alone? Who may bind themselves to the covenant in Isaiah 56:6 to 7? And the sharpest witness: when Hosea's formula reversal is picked up inside the New Testament (Romans 9:24 to 26, 1 Peter 2:10), to whom do the apostles apply "not my people... now my people"?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The prophets universalized their own promise. All nations stream to the raised mountain; God tells the Servant it is "too light a thing" to restore Jacob only, "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"; foreigners who join themselves to the LORD are brought to the holy mountain, "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." And the apostles, reading Hosea, apply the reversal to the Gentiles explicitly: those who were not my people, called my people, sons of the living God. The resolution is not that the Church replaces Israel and reads her mail; it is that the covenant made with Israel and Judah was always, per Abraham's third promise, held in trust for all the families of the earth, and the nations are grafted into Israel's own olive tree (Romans 11:17 to 24), wild branches drawing life from the patriarchal root, not a new tree planted beside it. The letter was addressed to Israel; the letter itself says it was written for the world. And note the Catechism's own reverence here: Israel remains the people of the elder brethren in the faith of Abraham (CCC 63), the root that carries us, never a discarded first draft; as Paul says in the same breath as the olive tree, "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

DIG DEEPER The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37: a valley of bones, "very dry," and the question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Then prophecy, a rattling, sinews and flesh, and the *ruach*, breath, wind, Spirit, the same word that hovered over creation's waters and moved over the flood, entering the slain so that they stand, "an exceedingly great host." The vision's own interpretation (37:11 to 14) is national: exiled Israel, dead and buried in Babylon, raised and brought home. But the promise underneath it, "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live," refuses to stay national. A God who resurrects a nation from a graveyard of bones has told you something about what he can do with

graves. File it.

8. Put the prophetic hope together as one picture. As the Old Testament closes, list what Israel is waiting for, from tonight and from the whole study: gather at least six items on the whiteboard.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group build it: a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18); a son of David for the empty throne, the shoot from the stump (Isaiah 11); a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4); the heart surgery, law written within (Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36); the new covenant with sins remembered no more, price unnamed; the second exodus and renewed wedding (Hosea 2); all nations streaming to the mountain (Isaiah 2); the lamb God will provide himself, still outstanding since Moriah (Genesis 22:8, 14); and the formula spoken again, this time never to be reversed. One more waiting item they may not name, so you name it last: their own sealed guesses, written ten weeks ago, about how God would bless all the families of the earth through this family. Bring Take-Home 1 next week. All of this converges next session; end the night exactly there.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Hosea's God responds to betrayal by alluring, not by annihilating: wilderness, tenderness, renewed vows. Is there a relationship in your life, with God or with a person, where you have been writing a verdict when you are being invited to write an invitation?

S2. The new covenant's deepest term is interiority: the law written on the heart rather than posted on the wall. Where is your faith still mostly posted, external compliance, and what would you ask the Spirit to write inside you instead?

Live It This Week

- Pray Ezekiel 36:26 every day this week, slowly. First read God's promise as written: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone." Then turn it into your own petition: a new heart give me, O God; a new spirit put within me; take the stone out of my chest.
- Go to Confession this week if you are able, and on the way, read Jeremiah 31:34: "I will remember their sin no more." Walk in carrying the promise; walk out having received it: sins truly forgiven, really absolved, and a pledge of the final communion when every promise is complete.
- FIND YOUR TAKE-HOME 1. The sealed guess you wrote in week one comes with you next session, unopened. Do not reread it yet. Also read, before next session, nothing new: instead reread Exodus 12:1 to 14 and Exodus 24:3 to 11, and come hungry.

Closing Prayer

Father, you spoke the unspeakable sentence, not my people, and even then you could not make it final; you hid a wedding inside the divorce and a honeymoon inside the wilderness. Write your law where you promised to write it. Give us the heart of flesh. And as the promises converge, gather us next week to the table where every waiting thing is answered. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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)

SESSION 9

A New Covenant I Will Make

Hosea's Marriage, the Exile, and the Promise of a Heart Made New

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Micah 6:1 to 2 and Isaiah 1:2 with Deuteronomy 30:19, the covenant lawsuit and its witnesses
- Hosea 1:2 to 9, the formula reversed: Lo-ammi (stop hard at verse 9)
- Hosea 2:14 to 16 and 2:23, the wilderness courtship; the formula resurrected
- Jeremiah 31:31 to 34, the only "new covenant" in the Old Testament; the four terms (live discovery)
- Jeremiah 31:31 to 34 again, the hunt for the missing price (nothing named; the cliffhanger)
- Ezekiel 36:24 to 28, water, heart, Spirit; the formula in verse 28 (live discovery)
- Isaiah 2:2 to 3, 49:6, 56:6 to 7, the nations stream to the mountain (steelman)
- Romans 9:24 to 26 and 1 Peter 2:10, Hosea applied to the Gentiles (steelman)
- Romans 11:17 to 24, grafted into Israel's olive tree (steelman resolution)

Supporting Passages

- Deuteronomy 28, the covenant sanctions (background for exile as executed curses)
- 2 Samuel 7:14 to 15, the rod of men over David's son, discipline not abandonment (Session 8 callback; Davidic logic extended to the exiled nation)
- Deuteronomy 30:6, the surgeon change (Session 7 harvest)
- Ezekiel 37:1 to 14, the dry bones and the ruach (Dig Deeper)
- Hebrews 8:8 to 12 and 10:16 to 17, Jeremiah 31 quoted in full: LEADER ONLY, do not preview
- Matthew 26:28 and Luke 22:20: ABSOLUTE SPOILER EMBARGO until next session

SESSION 10

This Cup

The Upper Room, the Cross, and the Night Every Thread Converges

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants open their sealed guesses from week one, then discover with their own eyes that Jesus, at a Passover meal, speaks Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31 in a single sentence over a cup; they follow the unfinished Passover from the Upper Room to Calvary, watch the corridor of blood from Genesis 15 receive its answer, and see the third promise of Genesis 12 sworn at last.

Catholic Touchstone. By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning; his passing over to his Father by his death and Resurrection is the new Passover, anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist (CCC 1340).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight is harvest. Ten weeks of planted threads converge on one meal and one hill, and the leader's task is almost entirely restraint: ask the questions, keep the pace slow, and let the group experience the recognition themselves. The session opens with the sealed guesses. Before any Scripture, have every participant open Take-Home 1 and read their week one guess aloud (voluntarily; never compel): where is God's covenant plan headed, and how will he get the whole world in on it? Receive every guess with honor; ten weeks ago none of them knew about the corridor of blood, the fourth cup, or the blank price line in Jeremiah. Then tell them: tonight the text answers the question you have been carrying. And begin.

The Synoptics are explicit that the Last Supper is a Passover meal (Luke 22:15, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer"; Mark 14:12 to 16). Everything the group learned in Session 6 is therefore in the room: an unblemished lamb, a household gathered, blood that marks, flesh that must be eaten, and a *zikkaron* in which later generations participate. Into that dense liturgical setting Jesus inserts new words, and the words are the payoff of the entire study. Over the bread: "This is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19). Over the cup, in Matthew's form: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28); in Luke's and Paul's form: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Set the two halves side by side. "My blood of the covenant" is Exodus 24:8, Moses' sentence at Sinai, the sentence the group memorized four weeks ago, now with a possessive: not the blood of bulls thrown from basins, but MY blood. "The new covenant" is Jeremiah 31:31, the only place in the entire Old Testament where those words occur, now given its missing mechanism: in my blood. And "for the forgiveness of sins" is Jeremiah's fourth term, the check, being cashed. One sentence, two covenants, and the blank price line filled in. The group must find these equations themselves via the discovery questions; if the leader announces them, the study's largest moment dies on the table.

Then the strange incompleteness. Jesus says he will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25), and the meal ends with a hymn and a departure to the Mount of Olives, which, on the Passover customs later codified in the Mishnah and argued by some scholars to reflect first-century practice, would be a meal broken off before its final cup. A well known and illuminating proposal (associated in our day with scholars like Brant Pitre and Scott Hahn, and worth presenting honestly as a scholarly reading rather than defined doctrine) follows the unfinished Passover out the door: in Gethsemane Jesus prays three times about a cup ("let this cup pass from me... your will be done"); on the way to Calvary he refuses the

drugged wine (Mark 15:23); and at the very end, John records, "I thirst," and they lift sour wine to his lips on a branch of hyssop, the Passover plant, the blood applicator of Exodus 12:22, and when Jesus has received it he says "It is finished" (*tetelestai*) and hands over his spirit (John 19:28 to 30). On this reading the Passover that began in the Upper Room is consummated on the cross: the fourth cup is drunk on Golgotha, and "it is finished" is the Passover's completion cry. Whatever one concludes about the proposal's details, the details John records are explicit in the text and have been read from the earliest centuries as deliberate Passover framing: the sour wine is offered on hyssop; John places the sentencing on the day of Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour (John 19:14), a timing many readers understand as placing Jesus' death while the Passover lambs were being slaughtered; and not one of his bones is broken, which John explicitly flags as fulfillment: "For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, Not a bone of him shall be broken" (19:36, a fulfillment citation widely read as invoking the Passover lamb rubric of Exodus 12:46, echoed also in Numbers 9:12; some also hear Psalm 34:20). The sealed envelope from Session 6's Dig Deeper opens tonight: the rubrics always described him.

And Genesis 15 receives its answer. The group has carried one question since Session 4: God alone walked the corridor of blood, swearing both sides of the covenant; what happens when the human side breaks it? Galatians 3:13 answers in covenant language: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree." On the reading this study has followed since Session 4, Genesis 15 as a self maledictory oath that God alone swore, the self sworn God keeps the self curse. The smoking fire pot that passed between the pieces passes, in the fullness of time, between heaven and earth on a tree, and the covenant curse that the human side earned is absorbed by the divine party who swore. Immediately after, Paul states the payout: "that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles" (3:14), and names the singular seed: "It does not say, And to seeds, referring to many, but, referring to one, And to your seed, which is Christ" (3:16). The seed of the woman (Session 2), the seed of Abraham sworn on Moriah (Session 5), the son of David (Session 8): one man, and through him the third promise of Genesis 12, all the families of the earth, moves from promise to sworn covenant: "the new covenant in my blood." The chart's blank row can now be filled: mediator, Jesus; seal, his own blood, the Eucharist; scope, the world.

Handle Moriah's geography with the study's usual honesty: 2 Chronicles 3:1 places the temple on Mount Moriah, and Golgotha stands outside the wall on the same Jerusalem heights; Scripture does not state that Calvary is the very spot of the Aqedah, and the study should not overclaim it. What Scripture does give is enough and more: on the ridge country of Moriah, where a father once said "God will provide himself the lamb" and the text added "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided," future tense, a beloved Son carried the wood of his own sacrifice up the hill, and this time no voice from heaven stopped the offering, because the Father, as Romans 8:32 says, "did not spare his own Son." The vacancy on the mountain is filled.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

This session is the trunk into which every root runs; the leader's map, briefly: the garments of skins (Session 2) anticipated God providing the covering at the cost of blood; the ark's one door (Session 3) anticipated salvation entered through a wounded side (John 19:34); Melchizedek's bread and wine (Session 4) anticipated the priest king's offering, and Psalm 110:4's "priest for ever" finds its subject; the Aqedah (Session 5) supplied the beloved son, the wood, and the unstopped hand; Passover and Sinai (Session 6) supplied the lamb rubrics, the words of the cup, and the meal that seals a covenant; the interim priesthood (Session 7) meets the priest whose office cannot expire; the Davidic king who carries the covenant in his body (Session 8) is enthroned, as the Fathers dared to say, with a titulus over his head reading King; and Jeremiah's check (Session 9) is cashed. Resist reciting this list to the group; the discovery questions surface the connections one at a time, and what the group finds, the group keeps.

One forward looking note the leader should hold: the Supper was not a farewell performance but an institution: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24 to 25), with *zikkaron* participation

(Session 6) as its grammar and "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26) as its horizon. What the Church does with that command, and how the covenant family lives now, is Session 11. Tonight ends at the cross and the torn veil; resist Easter and Pentecost for one more week.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Smyrnaeans 7.1 (c. AD 107)*

Writing on the road to his martyrdom, within living memory of the apostles, St. Ignatius identified the Eucharist without hedging: it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father in his goodness raised up. For Ignatius, a bishop taught by the apostles' own generation, the words of the Upper Room meant what they said.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr *First Apology, Chapter 66 (c. AD 155)*

Explaining Christian worship to a pagan emperor, St. Justin wrote that the food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken is not received as common bread or common drink, but, as Jesus was made flesh, so this food is the flesh and blood of that same incarnate Jesus, given only to the baptized who believe what the Church teaches. The second century's public explanation of the Supper is already fully covenantal: the meal makes and marks the family.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem *Mystagogical Catechesis 4.1-2 (c. AD 350)*

Teaching the newly baptized of Jerusalem, in sight of Golgotha itself, St. Cyril reasoned from the wedding at Cana: he who changed water into wine at a word, shall we not believe him when he changes wine into his blood? Since Christ himself declared, This is my body, who shall dare to doubt it? Cyril's confidence is the confidence of this whole study: the covenant words of the God who swore by himself mean what they say.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1339 to 1340. Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood. By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning; his passover to his Father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist.

CCC 610 to 611. Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve, on the night he was betrayed. The Eucharist he instituted at this moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice; he included the apostles in his own offering and bade them perpetuate it.

CCC 613. Christ's death is both the paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him through the blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

CCC 1365. Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice; the sacrificial character is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood."

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Tonight is the payoff of the entire study. Preparation is everything: reread Sessions 4, 5, 6, and 9 before leading. The discoveries must be found, not announced; your restraint is the delivery mechanism.
- OPENING RITUAL: the sealed guesses are opened first, before any Scripture, with honor and lightness. Never compel a reading; never grade a guess. The point is not who guessed right but that the question they wrote blind is the question the text answers tonight.
- The two great equations must come from the group: Matthew 26:28 = Exodus 24:8 + possessive; Luke 22:20 = Jeremiah 31:31 + mechanism. They memorized Exodus 24:8 and listed Jeremiah's terms; the equipment is installed. Trust it.
- The Genesis 15 corridor resolves at Galatians 3:13 to 14. Give the resolution silence when it lands; it has been ten weeks in the making.
- The chart gets its final row tonight: Jesus; his own blood, the Eucharist; the world. Bring the chart back (photo or redrawn) and let the group fill the blank row themselves at the session's end.
- Thread C, the mountain: handle Moriah and Golgotha with precision, the same Jerusalem heights, the temple pinned to Moriah by 2 Chronicles 3:1, no overclaim about the identical spot, and let Genesis 22:14's future tense do the work.
- The fourth cup material is presented as an illuminating scholarly reading, honestly labeled, never as defined doctrine. What is beyond dispute, John's hyssop, the preparation day timing, and the unbroken bones citation, carries the weight.
- Session ends at the cross and the torn veil (Matthew 27:51). No Easter, no Pentecost, no Church yet: one more week of discipline.

SESSION GOALS

1. Every participant has opened and, if willing, shared their week one guess, and felt the study's question become the text's question.
2. Participants discovered the two equations of the institution narrative themselves: Exodus 24:8 made possessive, Jeremiah 31:31 given its mechanism and price.
3. Participants followed the unfinished Passover from the Upper Room to the hyssop, the timing, and the unbroken bones, with the scholarly proposal honestly labeled.
4. Participants received the answer to the Genesis 15 question at Galatians 3:13 to 14 and connected it to the sworn third promise.
5. The chart is complete: mediator, seal, and scope of the new covenant, filled in by the group's own hands.
6. The steelman on sacrifice was engaged at full strength, and participants can state the Catholic teaching precisely: one sacrifice, re presented, never repeated.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and the guess opening ritual, 18 minutes; do not rush a single guess. Build, 52 minutes: the institution equations, 20, protected absolutely; the unfinished Passover to Calvary, 15; Galatians 3 and the chart completion, 10; steelman, 7. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: If the guess sharing runs long, let it: cut the Dig Deeper box on the wounded side to home reading and compress the steelman to its answer paragraph delivered as leader teaching.
- If running long: Never cut the equations, Galatians 3, or the chart.

SESSION 10

This Cup

The Upper Room, the Cross, and the Night Every Thread Converges

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, ten weeks ago we wrote our guesses about where your plan was going, and tonight we bring them to the table where every road in Scripture converges. Open the seals, open the texts, and open our eyes, like the disciples at another table, to recognize what you have been preparing since the garden. Through Christ our Lord, the Lamb you provided. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Open your Take-Home 1 and read your sealed guess, first silently to yourself. Who is willing to read theirs aloud? (Leader: receive each one with genuine honor; then say: tonight, the text answers the question you have been carrying since week one.)

W2. Before we open the passage: from everything this study has built, what are you now expecting the answer to be? Thirty seconds each, no wrong answers, and hold your Bibles closed.

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Luke 22:14 to 16 and Mark 14:12 to 16. What kind of meal is the Last Supper, according to the text itself, and what does Jesus say about his own desire for it? Inventory: from Session 6, what does that meal setting automatically place in the room?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A Passover: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," prepared on "the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb." Which means the whole apparatus of Session 6 is present: an unblemished lamb, a gathered household, blood that marks and saves, flesh that must be eaten, and the *zikkaron*, the memorial that makes participants of later generations. Whatever Jesus is about to do, he has chosen to do it inside the most covenant loaded liturgy Israel possesses.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

2. Now the center of the night, and of the study. Read Matthew 26:26 to 28 aloud, twice, slowly. Four weeks ago you memorized a sentence and were not told why. Say that sentence from memory now, then set it beside what Jesus says over the cup. What has he done to it, exactly, word by word?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The memorized sentence: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (Exodus 24:8), Moses at Sinai, basins of bull's blood, half on the altar, half on the people. Jesus over the cup: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." He has taken Sinai's ratification sentence and made it possessive: not the blood, MY blood. He is claiming to do, in his own person, what Moses did with basins: bind God and the people in one blood, one family, one covenant, and this time the blood is the mediator's own. Let the recognition happen in the room; the group has carried this sentence for a

month without knowing why. Now they know.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

3. Second equation. Read Luke 22:19 to 20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 25. Last week you found two words that occur together exactly once in the entire Old Testament, and you found what was missing from that passage. What does Jesus call this cup, and what has just happened to the missing thing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"This cup which is poured out for you is the NEW COVENANT in my blood." Two words with exactly one Old Testament address: Jeremiah 31:31. Jesus is not alluding; he is signing. And Jeremiah's blank price line, the promise of total forgiveness with no mechanism, no blood, no lamb named, is filled in: in my blood... for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew's form supplies Jeremiah's fourth term in substance: the forgiveness of sins, Jeremiah 31:34). The check written in Babylon is cashed in the Upper Room. One sentence over one cup joins Sinai and Jeremiah: the old covenant's ratification formula and the new covenant's promise, fused, with the price named: MY blood. This is the single densest sentence in the Bible, and the group has just decoded it with their own equipment.

4. Now the strangeness. Read Matthew 26:29 to 30. What does Jesus vow about the fruit of the vine, and what do they do next? For a Passover meal of that era, what has just happened to the liturgy?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He vows, "I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom," and they sing the hymn and leave for the Mount of Olives. If the four-cup structure later recorded in the Mishnah was already the custom, as scholars like Pitre argue, then a meal that ends with the hymn but without the final cup is a Passover suspended, broken off before its consummation. Jesus has deliberately left his own Passover unfinished and walked out into the night. Track the cup.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. Track it, then. Read Matthew 26:39 (Gethsemane), Mark 15:23 (the road), and then John 19:28 to 30 with total attention. What does Jesus pray about in the garden, what does he refuse on the way, and at the end: what does he say, what is lifted to him, on what plant, and what are his final words when he has received it? One of you should also check Exodus 12:22 for what that plant was used for.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In Gethsemane he prays three times about a cup: "let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." On the road he refuses the drugged wine. And at the end: "I thirst"; sour wine is lifted to his lips on hyssop, the plant Exodus 12:22 commands for applying the Passover lamb's blood to the doorposts; and "when Jesus had received the wine, he said, It is finished (*tetelestai*), and bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Present the reading honestly: a number of scholars (Brant Pitre and Scott Hahn have made it widely known) propose that the Passover suspended in the Upper Room is consummated here, the final cup drunk on the cross, "it is finished" as the Passover's completion cry. The Church has not defined that reconstruction, so hold it as illuminating rather than binding. But the details John himself records are explicit, and Christian readers have long taken them as deliberate Passover imagery: the hyssop; Jesus dying on the day of Preparation of the Passover (19:14), the day the lambs were slaughtered, a timing widely read as deliberate; and verse 36, which

opens the sealed envelope from Session 6: "these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, Not a bone of him shall be broken," wording widely understood as the Passover rubric of Exodus 12:46 (cf. Numbers 9:12). The unblemished lamb, kept close to the household, slain at the appointed hour, bones intact: the rubrics were always a description.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. And now the oldest question in the room. Since Session 4 you have carried this: God alone walked the corridor of blood, swearing both sides of the covenant with a self curse, and the human side broke it, at the calf, in the kings, in us. What happens to the God who swore? Read Galatians 3:13 to 14, and then verse 16. Answer the question, and tell me what promise gets paid out, to whom.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree." Many Christian interpreters read Genesis 15 and Galatians 3 together: the God who alone walked the corridor keeps the self curse; what passed between the pieces as fire and smoke passes between heaven and earth on a tree, and the covenant curse the human side earned is absorbed by the divine party who swore both sides, as Genesis 15 staged it while Abram slept. And the payout, verse 14: "that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles," through the seed, singular, "which is Christ" (3:16), the seed of the woman, of Abraham, of David, one man. Give this a full silence before moving. Ten weeks. Then say quietly: and that is why the cup is called the new covenant, and why it is for many. The third promise, all the families of the earth, just went under blood and oath.

7. Bring back the chart from Session 8, with its blank row of question marks. Fill it, as a group, all three columns: mediator, seal or sign, scope. Then read the whole chart aloud, top to bottom, and set your week one guesses beside it. What was God doing, from the first row to the last?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Mediator: Jesus, the seed, son of Adam, of Abraham, of David, Son of God. Seal: his own blood, given under the signs of bread and wine, the new covenant cup. Scope: "for many," all the families of the earth, the world. Read top to bottom: couple, household, tribe, nation, kingdom, world; Sabbath, rainbow, circumcision, Passover, throne, chalice. One family, widened by six covenants, sealed at last in the blood of the one who swore both sides from the beginning. Then honor the guesses again, briefly: some will have been astonishingly close, some far afield, and every one of them was the right question. This is the answer the Old Testament was pregnant with.

Build, Then Press | "The New Covenant Ends Sacrifice, So the Supper Cannot Be One"

State it at full strength, from Hebrews itself: "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10, 14). Once for all: the sacrifice is finished, unrepeatable, sufficient. Therefore, the objection runs, the Last Supper was a farewell meal with symbols, and any claim that the Mass is a sacrifice either repeats what cannot be repeated or adds to what needs no addition, dishonoring the cross it claims to honor. The concern is the sufficiency of Calvary, and it deserves reverence.

8. Reverence it, then press three witnesses. First, the words of institution themselves: "my body which is GIVEN for you," "my blood... POURED OUT for many," is that meal vocabulary or altar vocabulary, and it is

spoken in what tense, at a meal where, per Session 6, the sacrifice had to be eaten? Second, 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 21: what does Paul call the cup and the bread a participation in, and why does he set the Lord's table in direct rivalry with pagan altars if no altar is involved? Third, the prophet Malachi, addressing the future of the nations (1:11): what does he say will be offered among the Gentiles from the rising of the sun to its setting?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The institution words are sacrificial through and through: body given, blood poured out, the standard vocabulary of offering, spoken at a Passover, where the sacrifice is completed precisely by being eaten. Paul calls the Eucharist a *koinonia*, a real participation in the blood and body of Christ, and argues that one cannot share the table of the Lord and the table of demons, altar logic on both sides (10:21, and 10:18: "are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?"). Malachi foresees "in every place incense... and a pure offering" presented to God's name among the nations, which the Church from the first century read of the Eucharist. And the Catholic teaching, stated precisely, agrees with the steelman's deepest concern rather than violating it: the Mass is not a new sacrifice, not a repetition, and adds nothing to Calvary; it is the ONE sacrifice of the cross made present, re-presented, to every generation, exactly as the *zikkaron* of Session 6 made the exodus present to children born in the wilderness ("not with our fathers... but with us"). One offering, once for all, and by the covenant's own memorial mechanics, offered TO all, in every generation, until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26; CCC 1366 to 1367: one and the same victim, the manner of offering alone being different, a sacrifice truly propitiatory). Say the direction of it plainly, so no one leaves with a horizontal-only picture: in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once to the Father on Calvary is sacramentally offered to the Father through the ministry of the priest, and the fruits of that one propitiatory offering are applied to the Church, the living and the dead. Hebrews and the Mass are not rivals; Hebrews is the Mass's own theology of why nothing new is ever offered there.

DIG DEEPER **The Door in His Side**

John 19:34: a soldier pierces the dead Lord's side, "and at once there came out blood and water." John swears an eyewitness oath over this detail (19:35), so it mattered enormously to him. The Fathers heard the whole study in it: from the side of the sleeping Adam, God built the woman (Genesis 2:21 to 22); from the door in the ark's side, the saved family entered (Genesis 6:16, and St. Augustine's reading from Session 3); and from the opened side of the New Adam, asleep in death, flow blood and water, the Eucharist and baptism, the life of the Bride being built from his body. The covenant that began with "bone of my bones" ends with a Bridegroom giving bone and blood for the bride. Next session: who she is.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. You have now seen what the words over the chalice carry: Sinai, Jeremiah, Moriah, Egypt, and the corridor of blood, in one sentence. What will be different, concretely, the next time you kneel at Mass and hear them?

S2. Your week one guess is answered, but the answer creates a commission: the covenant is for "many," for all the families of the earth, and it travels by witness. Who is one person in your life who has never heard this story told as one story, and what is a first step toward telling them?

Live It This Week

- Go to Mass once this week, Sunday or daily, and at the consecration, silently pray the two source texts as the words are spoken: Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31. Receive holy Communion, if you are properly disposed, as what tonight showed it to be: the covenant meal on the mountain.

- Reread Genesis 22:1 to 14 in one sitting, then Romans 8:31 to 32, and thank the Father, in your own words, for not withholding.
- Before next session, read Acts 2:1 to 47. Count the nations, watch what Peter tells the crowd to do, and notice what the first covenant family devotes itself to in the last verses.

Closing Prayer

Father, you provided the Lamb. On the night he was betrayed he took the cup we could never lift, spoke Sinai and Jeremiah in one breath, and walked the corridor of blood to its end, becoming the curse we earned so that the blessing of Abraham could reach every family on earth, including ours, including tonight. We have opened our guesses; now open our lives. Never let us hear the words of the chalice as small again. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Luke 22:20 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 10

This Cup

The Upper Room, the Cross, and the Night Every Thread Converges

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Luke 22:14 to 16 and Mark 14:12 to 16, the Supper is a Passover
- Matthew 26:26 to 28 with Exodus 24:8, the first equation: MY blood of the covenant (live discovery)
- Luke 22:19 to 20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 25 with Jeremiah 31:31, the second equation: the price line filled (live discovery)
- Matthew 26:29 to 30, the vow and the unfinished cup
- Matthew 26:39; Mark 15:23; John 19:28 to 30 with Exodus 12:22, the cup tracked to the hyssop (live discovery; label the fourth cup proposal honestly)
- John 19:14 and 19:36 with Exodus 12:46, preparation day; not a bone broken (the Session 6 envelope opened)
- Galatians 3:13 to 14 and 3:16, the corridor answered; the blessing reaches the nations through the seed (live discovery)
- THE CHART completed: Jesus, his blood and the Eucharistic signs, the world
- Hebrews 10:10 to 14; 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 21; Malachi 1:11 (steelman)
- Matthew 27:51, the veil torn (session's final image)

Supporting Passages

- Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24 to 26, do this in remembrance; until he comes (Session 11 bridge; touch lightly)
- 2 Chronicles 3:1 and Genesis 22:14, Moriah geography, handled with precision, no overclaim
- Romans 8:32, the Father who did not withhold (Session 5 harvest)
- John 19:34 to 35 with Genesis 2:21 to 22, the opened side (Dig Deeper)
- CCC 1366 to 1367, one victim, the manner of offering different, truly propitiatory (steelman support)
- Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7, the priest for ever: surfaces fully in Session 11 if the group raises it

SESSION 11

The Family of God

Pentecost, the Church, and the Covenant Family Living Now

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Pentecost reverses Babel and launches the worldwide covenant family, that baptism and the Eucharist are the new covenant's entrance and renewal (harvesting Sessions 3, 5, and 6), and that the Church is the restored kingdom of David thrown open to the nations, God's visible covenant family in history, where "I will be your God" is lived now.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church is the goal of all things: God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the convocation of men in Christ, and this convocation is the Church (CCC 760). The Eucharist makes the Church (CCC 1396).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Acts 2 is Genesis 11 run in reverse, and the group should be allowed to discover the symmetry. At Babel, one proud people grasping at heaven had its language shattered and was scattered into the nations; at Pentecost, the Spirit descends in wind and fire on a gathered people at prayer, and the language barrier breaks in the opposite direction: "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6), and Luke lists the nations, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and onward, a deliberate table of nations moment. The scattering of Genesis 11 begins its great reversal, and the timing is liturgically loaded: Pentecost was Israel's feast fifty days after Passover, a feast Jewish tradition came to associate with the giving of the covenant at Sinai, an association explicit in later rabbinic sources and anticipated in Second Temple celebrations of the feast as a covenant renewal day (Jubilees; Qumran). At the first Sinai, the law was written on stone and three thousand fell in the aftermath of the calf (Exodus 32:28); at this Sinai, the Spirit writes on hearts, exactly as Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 promised, and "there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Three thousand lost at the covenant's breaking; three thousand gained at its renewal. Luke is not subtle, and the group, primed by ten weeks, will catch it.

Peter's Pentecost sermon is a covenant history lecture: David's tomb, David's throne, God's oath "to set one of his descendants upon his throne" (Acts 2:30, citing Psalm 132:11, the very verse the group used in Session 8 to prove the covenant was sworn), fulfilled in the risen Jesus, "both Lord and Christ." And when the crowd is cut to the heart and asks what to do, Peter's answer is covenant entrance: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you AND TO YOUR CHILDREN and to all that are far off" (2:38 to 39). Hear the harvests: forgiveness of sins is Jeremiah's fourth term; the gift of the Spirit is Ezekiel 36:27; "to your children" echoes the eighth day logic of Genesis 17, the covenant claiming infants before merit, the logic the Church hears behind infant baptism (CCC 1250 to 1252); and "all that are far off" is the third promise reaching for the nations. Baptism is circumcision's fulfillment as covenant entrance (Colossians 2:11 to 12, planted in Session 5), the flood's antitype (1 Peter 3:21, discovered in Session 3), and Ezekiel's sprinkled clean water, all at once.

And what does the newborn covenant family do? Acts 2:42 gives the four marks in one verse: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Teaching, communion, Eucharist, liturgy: the anatomy of covenant life. "The breaking of bread" is Luke's established term for the Eucharistic meal (Luke 24:30 to 35, where the risen Lord is "known to them in the breaking of the bread"), and 1 Corinthians makes its covenant mechanics explicit: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not

a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (10:16 to 17). The Eucharist is the covenant meal that continually makes the covenant family one, the *zikkaron* of the new Passover, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:26). Session 6 taught that sacrifice ends in communion and covenants conclude with a meal; the Church is the people who never stopped eating that meal.

One discovery must anchor the session's ecclesiology: Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem, where the Church's leaders rule on whether Gentiles enter the covenant family without circumcision. James settles it by quoting Amos 9:11 to 12: "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name" (Acts 15:16 to 17). Read what James has done: the fallen tent of David, the wrecked monarchy the group mourned in Session 8, has been rebuilt, and its rebuilding is identified with the Gentiles streaming into the Church. The Church is not a replacement for the Davidic kingdom, still less a detour from it; the Church IS the Davidic kingdom restored, fulfilled, and universalized in Christ, already present in mystery as the kingdom's seed and beginning on earth and awaiting its consummation (CCC 763, 669), exactly as Psalm 72 prayed: may all nations be blessed in him. The kingdom question of Acts 1:6, "will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?", is answered by the whole book: yes, and bigger than you asked.

Be honest about what the group can see with their own eyes: this covenant family is visible. It has entrance rites (baptism), a family meal (the Eucharist), officers (apostles, and the elders they appoint, Acts 14:23), a council that issues binding decisions ("it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," 15:28), discipline (Matthew 18:17, "tell it to the church"), and rolls that grow by countable thousands. Every covenant in this study had visible signs and a visible people, because covenants create families and families are visible. The steelman tonight takes the strongest opposing instinct, the invisible church of all true believers, with full seriousness and full fairness.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Everything here is harvest, and the leader's map is short: the ark (Session 3) becomes the Church that carries the family through the waters (CCC 845); Sinai's "kingdom of priests" (Session 6) is already on the group's shoulders via 1 Peter 2:9, found live that night; the interim Levitical priesthood (Session 7) yields to the priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7), whose bread and wine offering the group met in Session 4's Dig Deeper and whose unique priesthood the Church's ordained priesthood participates in and makes sacramentally present (CCC 1545); the personalized formula on the Davidic king (Session 8) now covers everyone incorporated into the king by baptism, "sons in the Son"; and Hosea's reversal (Session 9) is quoted over the Church's Gentile members: "once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10), tonight's memory verse.

What remains unharvested after tonight: the formula's final utterance, the wedding, the queen mother, and the tree of life. One session. The leader should end the night pointing forward: the covenant family is on the road, the meal is viaticum, food for the journey, and the study's last session asks where the road goes.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians* (c. AD 96)

Writing from Rome to a quarreling Corinth while the apostle John likely still lived, St. Clement appealed to visible, transmitted order: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ, and the apostles appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons, providing for succession after them. For Clement the covenant family had

structure from the beginning, not as bureaucracy but as inheritance: the household of God has stewards because it is a household.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan *Commentary on Psalm 40*

St. Ambrose, the bishop who baptized Augustine, compressed his ecclesiology into a single famous sentence: where Peter is, there is the Church; and where the Church is, there is no death but life eternal. The visible communion gathered around the apostolic office was not, for Ambrose, a human arrangement layered over the gospel; it was where the covenant life was found and fed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1845)*

St. John Henry Newman, studying the Fathers as an Anglican in search of the true Church, concluded famously that to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant: the Christianity of the second, third, and fourth centuries, visible, sacramental, hierarchical, Eucharistic, was recognizably the Catholic Church, and the covenant family of Acts is its infancy, not a different organism. History, Newman found, is the Catholic argument.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 751 to 752. The word Church means convocation or assembly: the assembly of those whom God's Word calls together to form the People of God who, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ. In Christian usage the word designates the liturgical assembly, the local community, and the whole universal community of believers: the three are inseparable.

CCC 766. The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self giving, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. As Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross: from his side flowed blood and water, the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.

CCC 1267. Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ and incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal fonts is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes.

CCC 1396. The unity of the Mystical Body: the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ; through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body, the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Tonight harvests the ecclesial threads: the ark, the royal priesthood, baptism (flood, circumcision, Ezekiel's water), the zikkaron meal, the rebuilt tent of David. Name each backward connection as the group finds it; they earned every one.
- The Babel reversal and the two Sinais (three thousand lost, three thousand added) are the session's two discovery jewels: let the group compute both.

- The formula tonight: lived, not spoken. God dwells in the family by the Spirit; the sentence itself is being saved. Its final utterance is one session away (Revelation 21:3); guard it absolutely: no Revelation quotations tonight.
- The gebirah (Session 8) stays parked one more week. If anyone asks about Mary tonight, smile: next session, and it is worth the wait.
- Thread C, the mountain: touched lightly tonight via Hebrews 12:22 held in reserve; the final summit belongs to Session 12. Zion language in Acts 2 (the upper room in Jerusalem) may be noted in passing.
- Melchizedek and Psalm 110:4 may surface if the group connects the priest for ever to the Church's priesthood; welcome it briefly (Hebrews 7) without derailing into a full priesthood study. That is another study (and the leader may commend one).

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have discovered the Babel reversal and the two Sinais symmetry (three thousand and three thousand) themselves.
2. Participants can name Peter's Pentecost offer as covenant entrance, and connect its clauses to Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, Genesis 17, and the third promise.
3. Participants have found Acts 2:42's four marks and can explain the Eucharist as the covenant family's zikkaron meal that makes the many one body.
4. Participants have discovered the rebuilt tent of David in Acts 15 and can state the claim precisely: the Church is the Davidic kingdom restored and opened to the nations.
5. Participants have engaged the invisible church steelman at full strength and can answer it from the covenant pattern itself.
6. Participants understand their own baptism and Communion as covenant events: entrance and renewal in the family of God.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: Pentecost and its symmetries, 18; baptism as covenant entrance, 10; the meal and the four marks, 10; the rebuilt tent of David, 8; steelman, 9. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q6 (the four marks) into leader teaching if the Pentecost discoveries run long; never cut the Acts 15 discovery or the steelman.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the keys for home reading.

SESSION 11

The Family of God

Pentecost, the Church, and the Covenant Family Living Now

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, fifty days after the Lamb was slain, you set fire on the heads of the praying and gave the nations back their one voice. What Babel scattered, Pentecost gathers; what Sinai wrote on stone, your Spirit writes on us. Gather us tonight into the family you have been building since the garden, and teach us to live as people who bear your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. When did a group of strangers first feel like family to you, a team, a parish, a unit, a friend group? What actually converted strangers into kin?

W2. What is the difference between believing the same things as other people and belonging to the same body as them? Can you have one without the other?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

1. Read Acts 2:1 to 11, and then flip back to Genesis 11:1 to 9. Set the two scenes side by side: what happens to language in each, in which direction do people move, and what is heaven's posture in each? What is Luke showing us?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Babel: one language shattered into many, a people scattered outward, heaven descending in judgment on human self exaltation. Pentecost: many languages made mutually heard ("each one heard them speaking in his own language"), the nations gathered inward (Luke's list is a deliberate table of nations), heaven descending in gift, wind and fire on a people at prayer. Pentecost is Babel reversed: the scattering of Genesis 11, which the call of Abram in Genesis 12 was launched to heal, begins its healing here. The third promise has left the ground.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

2. Second symmetry, and it takes two texts. Pentecost was Israel's feast fifty days after Passover, linked in Jewish tradition with the giving of the covenant at Sinai. Read Exodus 32:28, the aftermath of the golden calf, and then Acts 2:41. Find the number in each verse. What has Luke done?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At the first Sinai, after the calf, "there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." At the new Sinai, "there were added that day about three thousand souls." Three thousand lost at the covenant's breaking; three thousand gained at its renewal, on the covenant's own anniversary. The law written on stone brought death to the lawless; the Spirit writing on hearts brings the dead to life, exactly the contrast Paul draws (2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"). Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 are not being quoted at Pentecost; they are being performed.

3. Read Peter's sermon climax, Acts 2:29 to 36, with your Session 8 notes in reach. Which covenant is Peter preaching, which sworn oath does he cite (check verse 30 against Psalm 132:11), and what is his verdict about where the son of David is right now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Davidic covenant, argued like a lawyer: David died and his tomb "is with us to this day," but God "had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne," Psalm 132:11, the exact verse the group used to prove the covenant was sworn. Peter's verdict: the oath is kept in the resurrection and ascension; Jesus is enthroned at God's right hand, "both Lord and Christ." The throne of David turned out to be higher than Jerusalem. The steelman of Session 8 receives its final answer from the first Christian sermon ever preached.

4. The crowd, cut to the heart, asks "what shall we do?" Read Acts 2:38 to 39 slowly and take Peter's answer apart clause by clause with your whole study in hand: baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, "to you and to your children," and "to all that are far off." Where has each clause been planted in the last ten weeks?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Forgiveness of sins: Jeremiah's fourth term ("I will remember their sin no more"), now offered at a font. The gift of the Spirit: Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put my spirit within you." "To you and to your children": an echo of the eighth day logic of Genesis 17, where the covenant claimed infants before merit, a logic the Church has always heard in Peter's words and lives out in baptizing the children of believers (CCC 1250 to 1252). "To all that are far off": the third promise, all the families of the earth, already reaching past the crowd. Baptism is the new covenant's entrance: the flood's antitype (1 Peter 3:21, Session 3), circumcision made without hands (Colossians 2:11 to 12, Session 5), and Ezekiel's clean water (Session 9), in one sacrament. Nobody talks their way into a family; you are born or adopted into one, and the font is where the adoption is executed.

5. Read Acts 2:42, one verse, and list the four things the newborn covenant family devoted itself to. Then read Luke 24:30 to 35: what is "the breaking of bread" in Luke's vocabulary? And 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 17: what does the meal actually do to the many who share it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The apostles' teaching, the fellowship (*koinonia*), the breaking of bread, and the prayers: doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, the four marks of covenant life in one verse, recognizable in any Catholic parish tonight. The breaking of bread is Luke's name for the Eucharistic meal; at Emmaus the risen Lord "was known to them in the breaking of the bread." And Paul gives the mechanics: the cup a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ, the bread in his body, "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." Session 6 taught that sacrifice ends in communion and covenants conclude with a meal. The Church is the people who never stopped eating the covenant meal, and the meal is what keeps making them one family, generation after generation: the Eucharist makes the Church (CCC 1396).

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Now a discovery that answers Session 8's deepest ache. The apostles once asked the risen Lord, "will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Years later, at the Church's first council, the leaders must

decide whether Gentiles enter the family without circumcision, and James settles it with a prophet. Read Acts 15:13 to 19, and identify: what fallen structure does the quoted prophecy say God is rebuilding, and what is the rebuilt structure for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Amos 9:11 to 12: "I will rebuild the dwelling (the fallen tent) of David, which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name." James's ruling: the influx of Gentiles into the Church IS the rebuilding of David's fallen house. The Church is not a replacement for the Davidic kingdom or a detour around it; the Church is the Davidic kingdom restored, enthroned in the risen Son of David, and thrown open to the nations, the kingdom already present in mystery, its seed and beginning on earth, awaiting its consummation (CCC 763, 669), exactly as Psalm 72 prayed: "may men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed" (72:17) and exactly as the chart's last row requires: kingdom widened to world. The question of Acts 1:6 was answered yes, and bigger than the askers dreamed.

Build, Then Press | "The True Church Is Invisible"

Give this its full strength, because it is the instinct of millions of sincere Christians and it guards something true. On this view, the real Church is the invisible communion of all who truly believe, known to God alone; visible institutions, buildings, hierarchies, membership rolls, are human scaffolding, helpful at best, corrupt at worst, and never to be confused with the Body of Christ itself. Its proof texts are real: "the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed" (Luke 17:20); "God knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19); and the parable of the weeds warns that the visible field contains both wheat and tares until the harvest. Its motive is reverent: no institution can bind or box the grace of God.

7. Honor what it guards: the Church's membership is finally known to God, and visible belonging without living faith saves no one; Catholic teaching says both plainly. Now press the covenant pattern of the entire study. Name one covenant we have met, Adam to David to the Upper Room, that had no visible sign, no visible people. Then look at the family in Acts with your own eyes: how does one enter it (2:38, 41), what does it do together (2:42), who leads it and how are they appointed (14:23), how does it settle a binding dispute (15:28), what does Jesus himself say to do with an unrepentant brother (Matthew 18:17), and can you obey that last command if the church is invisible?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every covenant in this study came with visible signs (Sabbath, rainbow, circumcision, Passover blood, a throne, a chalice) and a visible people, and again and again the covenant sealed itself in a meal (Exodus 24:11, Passover, the Upper Room), because covenants create families and families are findable: you can knock on their door and eat at their table. The family in Acts is entered by a public washing, countable by thousands, ordered by appointed elders, ruled by a council that speaks bindingly ("it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"), and disciplined by a command, "tell it to the church," that is literally unbeyable if the church cannot be located. The resolution honors both truths, as the Catholic teaching does: the Church is one reality with a visible and an invisible dimension, a society structured with hierarchical organs AND the mystical body of Christ, not two churches but one, as a sacrament is one reality of sign and grace (Lumen Gentium 8; CCC 771, 779). The steelman is right that the visible membership includes tares and that God alone reads hearts; it errs in cutting the soul loose from the body. The new covenant did not become less incarnate than the old ones. It became more: the family of the God who took flesh has a table you can find, water you can feel, and shepherds you can name, and its rolls opened at three thousand.

DIG DEEPER The Keys of the House of David

One Davidic office quietly crossed into the Church alongside the kingdom. In Isaiah 22:20 to 22, the king's chief steward, master of the palace, is given "the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open": an office of stewardship over the kingdom, second to the king, and succession built in (Eliakim replaces Shebna). When Jesus, the Son of David, says to Simon, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19), Catholic interpreters, and many others, have long heard Isaiah 22 behind the words: he is installing a steward over his restored royal house. A kingdom that has been rebuilt (Acts 15) comes with its furniture. This study can only wave at the office; a full study of Peter and his successors is its own journey, and a worthy next one.

8. Close the loop on the formula. In this study's language, what is the Church, in one sentence built from the chart? And where, concretely, in your ordinary week, is "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" actually being lived by this family?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group compose it; a worthy version: the Church is the covenant family of God in its worldwide form, the sixth row of the chart, entered through water, fed at the table of the new covenant, ordered as the rebuilt kingdom of David, and sent to the remaining families of the earth. And the formula is lived every time the family gathers: at every font ("I baptize you in the name..."), every absolution ("I absolve you..."), every Mass ("this is my body... the new covenant in my blood"), God is keeping the sentence in the present tense. The formula has one more thing to do in this study: to be spoken, once, finally, in a voice from a throne. Next week we go to the wedding. Bring nothing but yourselves.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Peter's offer stands in the present tense, and its clause "to your children" runs through your house. Who in your family, children, godchildren, siblings, parents, is outside or drifting from the covenant family, and what is one concrete act of witness or invitation you can make this week?

S2. The first family devoted itself to four things: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, the prayers. Audit your own week honestly against the four. Which mark is thinnest in your life, and what is one specific step to thicken it before we meet again?

Live It This Week

- Find your baptism date if you have not already (Session 3's homework), and this week thank God for it explicitly: it was the day the covenant claimed you by name.
- At Mass this week, receive Communion (properly disposed) with 1 Corinthians 10:17 in mind: "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." Look at the people in the Communion line with you and call them, silently, what the covenant calls them: family.
- Before the final session, read Revelation 19:6 to 9, Revelation 21:1 to 7, and Revelation 22:1 to 5. Bring your Bible, your chart notes, and your Take-Home 1. Everything ends where it began.

Closing Prayer

Father, you have made of all nations one family in your Son: washed at one font, fed at one table, gathered around the shepherds you appointed, and sent to the families of the earth still waiting. Deepen our devotion to the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers, and keep us faithful on the road, until the family reaches the feast. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

1 Peter 2:10 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 11

The Family of God

Pentecost, the Church, and the Covenant Family Living Now

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Acts 2:1 to 11 with Genesis 11:1 to 9, Pentecost reverses Babel (live discovery)
- Exodus 32:28 with Acts 2:41, three thousand and three thousand, the two Sinais (live discovery)
- Acts 2:29 to 36 with Psalm 132:11, Peter preaches the sworn Davidic oath kept
- Acts 2:38 to 39, covenant entrance: the four clauses and their roots
- Acts 2:42 with Luke 24:30 to 35 and 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 17, the four marks; the meal makes the many one
- Acts 1:6 and Acts 15:13 to 19 with Amos 9:11 to 12, the tent of David rebuilt for the Gentiles (live discovery)
- Luke 17:20, 2 Timothy 2:19, Matthew 13:24 to 30, the invisible church steelman texts
- Acts 14:23, Acts 15:28, Matthew 18:17, the visibility texts (steelman press)

Supporting Passages

- 2 Corinthians 3:3 to 6, tablets of stone and tablets of hearts; the letter and the Spirit
- Colossians 2:11 to 12 and 1 Peter 3:21, baptism harvests (Sessions 5 and 3)
- 1 Corinthians 11:26, until he comes (the road points forward)
- Isaiah 22:20 to 22 with Matthew 16:19, the steward's keys (Dig Deeper; another study beckons)
- CCC 771 and Lumen Gentium 8, one Church, visible and invisible dimensions (steelman resolution)
- Hebrews 12:22 to 24 and all of Revelation: EMBARGOED until Session 12

SESSION 12

The Marriage Supper

The Formula From the Throne, the Woman and the Lamb, and the Wedding the Bible Was Always Planning

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants hear the covenant formula spoken from the throne itself, first over the whole family (21:3) and finally to each conqueror (21:7), and discover that Scripture ends where it began: a garden, a tree of life, a wedding. The remaining threads resolve: the woman crowned in heaven, the Lamb standing as though slain, the mountain that every nation climbs, and the Mass as the wedding feast already begun.

Catholic Touchstone. Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (CCC 1602). In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city (CCC 1090).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Revelation frightens many readers; tonight the study renders it familiar, because the group now owns its vocabulary. The book is a covenant document and a liturgy: a Lamb, blood, an altar, incense, hymns, a scroll unsealed, a meal announced, and a wedding. Nearly every image the group has spent twelve weeks acquiring appears here in its final form. The leader's work tonight is orchestration: let each harvested thread be recognized, named backward to its planting, and laid down finished.

The center of the night, and of the study, is Revelation 21:1 to 7. A new heaven and a new earth; the holy city, new Jerusalem, "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"; and then the voice from the throne: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them" (21:3). The covenant formula, first whispered to a ninety nine year old man in Genesis 17, expanded at the exodus, personalized onto David's son, reversed by Hosea, resurrected by the prophets, sealed in blood in an upper room, is now spoken from the throne of God as the description of eternity, with every tear wiped away and death itself dead. And verse 7 gives the formula its most intimate final form, singular, personal: "he who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son." The sentence the group has hunted for twelve weeks turns out to be addressed, at the end, to each of them by name. When this passage is read tonight, read it standing, and let there be silence after it.

Around that center, the resolutions. The wedding: "the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:7, 9). The study opened with Adam's wedding vow in a garden ("bone of my bones"); Scripture closes with the wedding of the New Adam and the Bride built from his opened side (Session 10's Dig Deeper; CCC 766). The Catechism itself draws tonight's inclusio: Scripture begins with a wedding and ends with one (CCC 1602). The garden: "the river of the water of life... and on either side of the river, the tree of life" (22:1 to 2), the tree barred behind cherubim in Genesis 3:24 now standing in an open city whose gates are never shut, its leaves "for the healing of the nations," with the explicit annulment: "there shall no more be anything accursed" (22:3), the curse of Genesis 3 formally lifted. The Lamb: "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (5:6), slain and standing, the Aqedah's provision and Passover's rubrics alive at the center of the throne, and the hymn gives the covenant scope: "by your blood you ransomed men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9), the third promise, sung as accomplished fact.

The woman: Revelation 12 shows "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars," who bears "a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (12:1, 5, Psalm 2's Davidic ruler), opposed by "that ancient serpent" the group unmasked in Session 2, at war with "the rest of her offspring... those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (12:17). Here the study's Marian threads converge, and the leader should teach them with the Church's own confidence and precision: the woman is a deliberately layered figure, Israel who labors to bring forth the Messiah, the Church who continues to bear children into the covenant, and, the Church has long read, Mary, the mother of the male child, the New Eve of Session 2 whose seed crushes the serpent, and, from Session 8, the *gebirah*: for if the Davidic kingdom is restored (Acts 15, last session), then the kingdom's offices return with it, and the mother of the enthroned Son of David appears in heaven crowned, and the Church's tradition recognizes in her the queen mother of the new covenant kingdom, whose office, as 1 Kings 2:19 showed, is to be honored by the king and to intercede. Elizabeth's greeting, held back since Session 8, may now be delivered: "why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43), which Catholic interpreters have long heard as court language, echoing the address due the *gebirah*, the mother of the king. The layers do not compete; a symbol this rich is layered on purpose.

And the mountain: Hebrews 12:22 to 24, the text that gathers the whole study in three verses, and the group should be allowed to mine it themselves: "you HAVE come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel." Perfect tense: have come, already, now, every time the covenant family gathers at the altar. The seventh mountain of the study is the one the Church stands on at every Mass, which is why the priest says, over the chalice the group can now hear correctly, "Behold the Lamb of God... blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb," an adaptation of Revelation 19:9, heard at every Communion. The Mass is the wedding feast itself under sacramental veils, with the Bridegroom already present; eternity is the same feast with the veils removed.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Tonight nothing is planted; everything flowers. The leader's harvest map, for confidence: Sabbath rest (Session 1) becomes the rest of the city where night is no more; the barred tree (Session 2) stands open with its curse annulled; the ark's saved family (Session 3) is the Bride descended from heaven; the stars Abram counted (Session 4) crown the woman and fill the city of the redeemed "from every tribe and tongue"; Moriah's provided Lamb (Session 5) stands slain and living at the throne; the meal on the mountain (Session 6) is eaten at Mount Zion with the mediator of the new covenant; the interim priesthood (Session 7) has yielded to the priest for ever, and the ache the law trained is satisfied; the throne sworn to David (Session 8) holds the male child who rules the nations, with the *gebirah* beside it; Hosea's wedding hidden in the divorce (Session 9) is the marriage supper announced; the cup (Session 10) is drunk new in the kingdom; and the family (Session 11) arrives home. The formula, hunted since Genesis 17, is spoken from the throne and then, in 21:7, to each conqueror singly.

End the study with commissioning, not just closure: the guests of the supper are also its couriers ("the Spirit and the Bride say, Come," 22:17), and the group should leave knowing the whole story well enough to give it away: to their children, their parishes, and the families of the earth still uninvited.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 22, Chapter 30*

St. Augustine ended his greatest work by describing the endless sabbath of the city of God: there we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise; this is what shall be in the end without end. The seventh day of Genesis,

which had no evening, was for Augustine the first draft of eternity: the covenant rest God hallowed on page one is the rest the whole story was walking toward.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great *Dialogues, Book 4*

St. Gregory the Great taught what the Church has always sensed at the altar: at the hour of the sacrifice, heaven opens, the choirs of angels are present, the lowest things are joined to the highest, and earth is united with heaven. For Gregory the Mass is not a picture of the heavenly liturgy but a participation in it: the same Lamb, the same worship, one feast in two rooms with the door standing open.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Damascene *Homilies on the Dormition*

St. John Damascene, preaching on the Mother of God assumed into glory, reasoned from the kingdom's own logic: it was fitting that the mother of the King should be brought to the palace of her Son and honored beside his throne, for the ark of the new covenant, which carried the Lawgiver himself, belongs where the Lawgiver reigns. What Israel gave its queen mothers in figure, the Son of David gives his mother in fullness: nearness, honor, and a voice that intercedes.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1602. Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding feast of the Lamb." Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its mystery, and the whole of Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church.

CCC 1090. In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; with all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord, venerating the memory of the saints, and we await the Savior, until he appears.

CCC 796. The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship, often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride: the Lord referred to himself as the bridegroom, and the Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb, whom Christ loved and for whom he delivered himself up.

CCC 1044 to 1045. In this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men: he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. For man, this consummation will be the final realization of the unity of the human race, which God willed from creation; those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, the holy city of God, the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- Tonight is pure harvest and commissioning. Bring: the completed chart, a printed list of the threads if it helps you orchestrate, and unhurried time for silence after Revelation 21:1 to 7 is read standing.
- The formula's final communal proclamation (21:3) and its personal, singular culmination (21:7) are the study's last summit. Read them standing; do not talk quickly afterward.

- The Marian material is taught with confidence AND precision: the woman of Revelation 12 is deliberately layered (Israel, the Church, Mary), the gebirah logic follows from the restored kingdom, and where the Church has defined (Mary's queenship is honored in the liturgy and magisterium; the layered reading of Revelation 12 is the Church's living tradition), teach plainly; where readings are traditional rather than defined, say so. Precision is devotion's best friend.
- Hebrews 12:22 to 24 is the final mountain and deliberately mined by the group: firstborn, mediator, new covenant, sprinkled blood, Zion, in one text. Let them find each backward reference.
- The Ecce Agnus Dei connection (Revelation 19:9 echoed at every Communion) should land near the end: the study's last discovery is that they have been attending the wedding feast all along.
- Close with the sealed guesses one final time, lightly: the question of week one, answered by the whole canon, now becomes their commission (22:17).

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants heard the covenant formula from the throne (21:3) and in its singular form (21:7), and experienced it as the resolution of the entire study.
2. Participants traced the inclusio themselves: garden to garden, wedding to wedding, tree to tree, curse pronounced to curse annulled.
3. Participants can articulate the layered identity of the woman of Revelation 12 with both confidence and precision, and connect her to the New Eve and the gebirah.
4. Participants mined Hebrews 12:22 to 24 and recognized the Mass as participation in the heavenly liturgy, with Revelation 19:9 heard at every Communion.
5. Participants left commissioned: the covenant story is now theirs to give away.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: the wedding and the throne formula, 20, with real silence; the woman, 12; the Lamb and the mountain, 13; the Mass connection, 10. Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer, and a real goodbye, 23 minutes; do not shortchange the ending of a twelve week family.

- If running long: If time compresses, fold the Dig Deeper on the ark of the covenant into the Revelation 12 discussion in two sentences.
- If running long: Never cut the standing reading of 21:1 to 7, the silence after it, or the commissioning close.

SESSION 12

The Marriage Supper

The Formula From the Throne, the Woman and the Lamb, and the Wedding the Bible Was Always Planning

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, you began the story with a wedding in a garden and you have been sending invitations ever since: through a rainbow, a starfield, a bloodmarked door, a mountain table, a throne, a cup. Tonight we read the last page. Speak over us the sentence you have been keeping since Eden, and seat us, unworthy and washed, at the supper of the Lamb. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

- W1.** Describe the best wedding you have ever attended. What made it that one, and what did the feast afterward feel like?
- W2.** Twelve weeks ago you wrote a guess about where this whole story was headed. Before we open the last book: in one sentence, where do you now believe it has been headed all along?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

- 1.** Read Revelation 19:6 to 9. What event has come, who has made herself ready, and what does the angel command John to write in verse 9? Then reach all the way back: what was the first covenant scene in this entire study, in Genesis 2, and what has Scripture just done?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The marriage of the Lamb has come; his Bride has made herself ready, clothed in fine linen, "the righteous deeds of the saints"; and the beatitude is dictated for writing: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." The study's first covenant scene was a wedding in a garden, Adam's vow, bone of my bones. Scripture has ringed itself: it begins with a wedding and ends with one (the Catechism says exactly this, CCC 1602), and every covenant between them was the courtship. The Bride, built from the opened side of the New Adam as Eve from the first (CCC 766), is the family this study has watched widen for twelve weeks: us.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

- 2.** Now stand, all of you, and read Revelation 21:1 to 7 aloud, slowly, and when the voice from the throne speaks in verse 3, you will hear something you have been hunting since Genesis 17. Then look at verse 7 and notice what happens to the sentence's grammar. (Leader: after the reading, keep silence for a full thirty seconds before anyone speaks.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them": the covenant formula, in its final communal proclamation, from the throne, as the description of eternity, with every tear wiped away and death dead. First said to one old man under the stars; expanded to a nation at the exodus; personalized onto David's son; reversed by Hosea into "not my people";

resurrected by Jeremiah and Ezekiel; sealed in blood over a cup; and now the voice of God announces it accomplished, forever, irreversibly. And verse 7 turns it singular: "I will be his God and he shall be my son." The sentence the study is named for ends addressed to each conqueror, one by one, by name. This is where the whole Bible was going.

3. Read Revelation 22:1 to 5 beside Genesis 3:8 to 24. Inventory the reversals, item by item: the tree, the way to it, the curse, the faces, the night.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The tree of life, barred in Genesis behind cherubim and a flaming sword, now stands on both banks of the river in an open city whose gates never shut, its leaves "for the healing of the nations." The guarded way is now a lighted street. "There shall no more be anything accursed": the curse of Genesis 3 formally annulled. The hidden faces of Eden ("I hid myself") become "they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads." And night, where all the hiding happened, "shall be no more." Genesis 3 is repealed clause by clause. The expulsion, we learned in Session 2, barred the tree "lest" fallen man eat it wrongly; Revelation 22:14 gives the readmission: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life."

4. Read Revelation 5:6 to 10. What does John see at the center of the throne, in what impossible condition, and what does the new song say the Lamb's blood accomplished, for whom, and what did it make of them? Count the harvests in this one passage from Sessions 5, 6, and beyond.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain": slain and standing, dead and alive, the wound eternal and the life invincible. Moriah's promise, "God will provide himself the lamb," stands at the center of heaven; Passover's rubrics (unblemished, slain, bones unbroken) describe the figure on the throne. And the song: "by your blood you ransomed men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God." The third promise of Genesis 12, sung as accomplished fact; and Sinai's vocation, a kingdom of priests, conferred on the ransomed of every nation. The blood of the covenant did everything the covenants promised.

5. Read Revelation 12:1 to 5 and 12:17, with Session 2 and Session 8 open in your memory. Who is the woman, and answer carefully, because the text has layered her on purpose: what in the passage points to Israel, what points to the Church, and what points to Mary? And from Session 8: if the Davidic kingdom has been restored, what office should we expect to find beside the throne, and what do we in fact see on this woman's head?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The male child "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" is Psalm 2's Davidic Messiah, so his mother is, at the first layer, Israel, the covenant people in labor through the centuries to bring forth the Christ (the twelve stars evoke the twelve tribes). At another layer she is the Church, for "the rest of her offspring" are "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus": she has children still, and the dragon wars on them. And at the layer the Church has read from early centuries: the mother of the male child is Mary, the woman of Genesis 3:15 whom we met in Session 2, the New Eve whose seed the ancient serpent, named here by his Eden alias, has hated from the beginning. The layers do not compete; a symbol this deliberate is layered on purpose. And Session 8's logic completes it: the kingdom of David is restored (Acts 15), and restored kingdoms come with their offices; the gebirah, the queen mother enthroned beside the son of David, honored by the king

and carrying petitions (1 Kings 2:19), reappears where the kingdom reappears: the text itself shows a woman crowned in heaven whose Son is enthroned (12:5); the Church's tradition completes the picture, seeing in her the queen mother of the new covenant kingdom, honored and interceding as the gebirah did. Be clear that the office and the intercession are the tradition's typological reading of the scene, not an explicit statement of the passage. Now, at last, deliver the verse held since Session 8: Elizabeth's greeting to Mary, "why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43), language many Catholic interpreters hear as a Davidic court address to the mother of the king, a traditional reading that fits the restored kingdom logic, taught as such. Teach the precision too: the layered reading of Revelation 12 and the gebirah typology are the Church's living tradition, taught with confidence; Mary's queenship itself the Church celebrates liturgically and magisterially. Precision and devotion are friends.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. One mountain remains. This study has climbed Eden, Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Zion, and Calvary, and Isaiah promised a mountain all nations would stream to. Read Hebrews 12:22 to 24 and mine it as a group: find at least five terms this study has taught you, and then answer the question the verb tense forces: WHEN do the baptized come to this mountain?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The finds: Mount Zion (the mountain thread's summit); the heavenly Jerusalem (the city bride); "the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (the firstborn thread: Israel my firstborn, the consecrated firstborn, now a whole assembly); "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Jeremiah's phrase with its mediator named); and "the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Exodus 24's sprinkling, and blood that speaks: Abel's cried for vengeance from the ground, this blood speaks pardon). And the tense: "you HAVE come," perfect tense, already, now. Not "you will come someday." Be precise about the two steps, because both are true: Hebrews itself declares that Christians have already come to the heavenly Zion, the festal assembly, the mediator, and the sprinkled blood; and the Church teaches that the earthly liturgy is where that access is sacramentally realized, a real participation in the heavenly liturgy (CCC 1090). Put the two together and the conclusion stands: every time the covenant family gathers at the altar, it stands on the final mountain among the angels. The last summit is not ahead of the Church; it is beneath her, at every Mass.

7. Then test that startling claim against something you will hear within the week. At every Mass, immediately before Communion, the priest raises the Host and says: "Behold the Lamb of God... Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." You now know both halves. Where is each from, and what is the Church claiming about the moment you are standing in?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Behold the Lamb of God" is the Baptist's cry (John 1:29), Moriah and Passover answered in one sentence. "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb" adapts Revelation 19:9, the angel's dictated wedding beatitude ("Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb"), deliberately woven into the Missal and heard at every Communion. The Church is claiming, out loud, at every Mass, that the Communion procession is a movement of wedding guests toward the marriage supper: the same Lamb, the same feast, one banquet in two rooms with the door standing open (as St. Gregory the Great taught, at the hour of the sacrifice heaven opens). You have been attending the wedding feast of the Lamb, under veils, your whole Catholic life. After twelve weeks, you finally know what the invitation says.

DIG DEEPER The Ark in Heaven and the Woman

One verse earlier than the woman: "God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple" (Revelation 11:19), and the very next words are "And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun." John, who wrote without chapter divisions, sets the long lost ark and the woman side by side. The ark carried the word of God on stone, the manna, and the priestly rod; Mary carried the Word made flesh, the living Bread, and the eternal priest. Luke had already draped ark imagery over her: the overshadowing cloud (Luke 1:35 with Exodus 40:35), the three month stay (1:56 with 2 Samuel 6:11), David's "how can the ark come to me" beside Elizabeth's "why is this granted me" (2 Samuel 6:9 with Luke 1:43). A traditional reading, honestly labeled, and after twelve weeks of typology the group can weigh it with educated eyes.

8. Last question of the study. Take out your Take-Home 1 one final time and reread your sealed guess, then read Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come." Your question from week one has been answered by the whole canon. What does the answer now ask of you?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let each person answer personally; the text's own answer is that the guests are made couriers: "let him who hears say, Come." The covenant family widened from a couple to the world by invitation carried person to person, parent to child, friend to friend, and the third promise still has families of the earth uninvited, some of them at the group's own dinner tables and workplaces. The study ends as every covenant scene ended: with a meal and a sending. Commission them plainly: you now know the whole story as one story; it was given to you to be given away. Then pray the closing prayer, and do not rush the goodbye; this table was itself a small covenant, and it should end with honor.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. You now possess the whole story as one story, which most Catholics, and most Christians, have never once heard told that way. Who will you teach it to, formally or informally, and what is your first concrete step: a family Bible night, a parish group, one friend, your own children?

S2. The formula ends singular: "I will be his God and he shall be my son." Sit with that address this week. What in your life still resists being included in that sentence, and what would surrendering it look like before your next Communion?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, when you hear "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb," answer silently with Revelation 22:17: "Come, Lord Jesus," and walk to Communion as what you now know yourself to be: a wedding guest.
- Write, on the back of your Take-Home 1 beneath your old guess, the answer in your own words, one paragraph, dated. Keep the sheet in your Bible at Genesis 17.
- Choose your first courier act within seven days: invite one person to Mass, to this study's next run, or to a conversation about the one story. The Spirit and the Bride say Come; say it with them, out loud, to someone.

Closing Prayer

Father, you have kept every word. You swore to be our God under the stars, in the blood, on the mountain, over the cup, and you will say it last from the throne with every tear already wiped away. Seat us at the

supper of the Lamb, and until the veils are removed, make us faithful guests and bold couriers of the invitation. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain and stands, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."

Revelation 21:3 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 12

The Marriage Supper

The Formula From the Throne, the Woman and the Lamb, and the Wedding the Bible Was Always Planning

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Revelation 19:6 to 9, the marriage supper announced; the dictated beatitude
- Revelation 21:1 to 7, THE FORMULA FROM THE THRONE, read standing (live discovery); verse 7, the singular form
- Revelation 22:1 to 5 with Genesis 3:8 to 24, the reversals inventoried; 22:14, the right to the tree
- Revelation 5:6 to 10, the Lamb standing as though slain; the new song of every nation
- Revelation 12:1 to 5 and 12:17, the layered woman; the Davidic child; the ancient serpent
- 1 Kings 2:19 and Luke 1:43, the gebirah delivered at last
- Hebrews 12:22 to 24, the final mountain, mined by the group (live discovery)
- John 1:29 and Revelation 19:9, the Ecce Agnus Dei decoded (the Missal adapts Revelation 19:9)
- Revelation 22:17, the commissioning: the Spirit and the Bride say Come

Supporting Passages

- CCC 1602, Scripture begins and ends with a wedding (the inclusio, in the Church's own words)
- CCC 766, the Church born from the opened side, as Eve from Adam
- Psalm 2:8 to 9, the rod of iron, the Davidic child identified
- Revelation 11:19, the ark seen in heaven (Dig Deeper), with Luke 1:35, 1:43, 1:56 and Exodus 40:35, 2 Samuel 6:9 to 11
- Genesis 2:23 and Genesis 3:15, the study's first wedding and first promise, for the closing frame
- St. Gregory the Great, Dialogues 4: at the hour of the sacrifice, heaven opens