

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

We started with the distinction everything else will build on: a contract exchanges goods, but a covenant exchanges persons. A contract says "this is yours"; a covenant says "I am yours." Marriage, not commerce, is the model.

Genesis never uses the word covenant in the creation account, but we caught God saying it elsewhere. Exodus 31:16 to 17 calls the Sabbath "a perpetual covenant" rooted in the seven days, and Jeremiah 33 speaks of God's "covenant with the day and night." Creation is covenant shaped, and in Hebrew the words for "seven" (sheva) and "swear an oath" (shava) share the same letters, a wordplay Scripture itself exploits at Beersheba, the "well of the seven," the "well of the oath" (Genesis 21:22-31).

We also found that Eden is described like a sanctuary and Adam like a priest and son: "to till and to keep" (Genesis 2:15) is the Levites' job description (Numbers 3:7 to 8), and Luke's genealogy calls Adam "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). Read this way, as many Fathers and biblical scholars have read it, the world is a temple built so that a family could live in it with God, and the Sabbath is the standing appointment.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 11, Section 8*

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 (see CCC 56-64 and Eucharistic Prayer IV): 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)*

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. Building on his insight, this study will suggest that Scripture's first covenant scene is a wedding, and that its last scene is one too (see Revelation 19:7; 21:2).

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 sworn yourself to your creation; teach me to rest in your oath."
- Read Genesis 3 slowly before next session. Just read it; bring your questions.

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)

MY GUESS | SEALED UNTIL LATER

This story starts with one couple in a garden. Here is your one question to carry through this whole study: where do you think God's covenant plan is ultimately headed, and how do you think he will get the whole world in on it? Write your honest guess below.

My guess:

Write it, fold this corner over, and do not change it. We will open our guesses together later in the study.

Before Next Session: Read Genesis 3 slowly, once. Notice who speaks, in what order, and what God says to the serpent.

Catechism References: CCC 54 to 55, 288, 346 to 348, 2569

SESSION 2

The Serpent and the Seed

The Fall as Covenant Breach and the First Gospel

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

Genesis 3 turned out to be covenant breach, not mere rule breaking. The serpent's strategy had three moves: misquote God, contradict God, and slander the Father's motives, recasting the covenant as a rigged contract. The first sin was believing a lie about who God is, and Adam, the appointed guardian, stood silent beside his bride.

Then the astonishing turn: before any discipline is spoken, God plants a promise inside the curse on the serpent. Genesis 3:15 names a seed of the woman (against the Bible's usual pattern of counting descent through men), uses a singular pronoun ("he shall bruise your head"), and shows the victor wounded in the winning. We confirmed the reading from Scripture itself: Revelation 12:9 unmasks "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan," and Romans 16:20 promises Satan crushed under the feet of Christ's people. The Church calls this verse the Protoevangelium, the first gospel.

We ended with the Fathers' oldest Marian insight: Eve, a virgin, believed a fallen angel and brought forth death; Mary, a virgin, believed a faithful angel and brought forth Life. And we noticed what the garments of skins imply, the Bible's first bloodshed, God clothing the ashamed at the cost of animal life: covering sin costs a life, and God himself provides it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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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.

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."

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)

Before Next Session: Read Genesis 6:5 to 22 and Genesis 9:8 to 17. Count how many times God says the word "covenant."

Catechism References: CCC 397, 410 to 412, 2568

SESSION 3

Through Water

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

We found the word "covenant" for the first time in the Bible, Genesis 6:18, and we noticed the roster: "you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives." The bond that embraced a couple in Eden now embraces a household. And we heard how God holds a breaking world: not like a vendor over a bad account, but "grieved... to his heart," the way only family can grieve you.

The flood turned out to be creation running in reverse and then beginning again: the waters of day two collapse back together, God makes a ruach (wind, spirit) pass over the earth, the same Hebrew word that hovered over the deep in Genesis 1:2, and Noah steps onto a washed world as a new Adam, receiving the opening words of Adam's own blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1; cf. 1:28). His first act is to build an altar to the LORD; God's response is an oath of peace, and he sets his bow in the clouds. Many interpreters see a warrior's bow hung up, turned away from the earth. It is a sign the text says God himself will look at and remember.

Then the New Testament told us what it all pointed to. 1 Peter 3:20 to 21: eight were "saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The ark prefigures the Church, the flood prefigures the font, and the dove over the waters returns at the Jordan. But the story could not end at Ararat: within verses, sin is back in Noah's own tent. The flood washed the world, not the heart. Something more was coming.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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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.

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.

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)

Before Next Session: Read Genesis 12:1 to 9 and Genesis 15. In chapter 15, watch what happens to the animals, and note carefully who passes between them.

Catechism References: CCC 56 to 58, 701, 845, 1219

SESSION 4

Count the Stars

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

Out of the wreckage of Babel, God called one childless old man and made him three promises that map the rest of the Bible: a great nation, a great name, and blessing for "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:1 to 3). Keep your written list of the three; this study will watch each one grow up into a sworn covenant.

When Abram asked, "How am I to know?", God answered with the ancient world's most serious ritual: animals cut in two and a corridor of blood between the halves. Jeremiah 34:18 to 20 gave us the decoder: God declares that those who broke his covenant will be made like the calf they cut in two and passed between. To walk the corridor of blood was to enact a self-curse: in effect, may I become like these animals if I break this oath. And then the detail that changes everything: Abram was in a deep sleep, and a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, God's own fiery signature, passed down the corridor alone. By the ceremony's own logic, only the one who walks the corridor swears the oath, and Abram, in a deep sleep, never walked. God alone bound himself. Many Christian interpreters, reading this scene in light of the cross, have seen God here taking upon himself even the human side of the covenant, a claim we will keep testing as the story unfolds. Hebrews 6 says he "swore by himself" because there was no one greater, "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false."

We tested the claim that the promises were merely earthly acreage, and Scripture itself widened them: Paul says Abraham was promised "the world" (Romans 4:13), and Hebrews says he was looking through the land toward "a better country, that is, a heavenly one." The land was real, the way an engagement ring is real: a true gift, and the pledge of something greater. And a question was left deliberately open on the table, so carry it with you: if the human side breaks this covenant, what happens to the God who swore?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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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.

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.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

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

Genesis 15:6 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session: Read Genesis 17:1 to 14 and Genesis 22:1 to 19. In chapter 17, watch for the sentence where 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.

Catechism References: CCC 59 to 60, 705 to 706, 762, 2570 to 2571

SESSION 5

The Lord Will Provide

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

Tonight the sentence arrived. Twenty-four years after the call, God spoke the vow this whole study is named for: "to be God to you and to your descendants after you... an everlasting covenant" (Genesis 17:7). That is the covenant formula, and you now know it by ear. Watch for it; wherever it sounds, you are standing at a covenant. With it came new names, Abraham the father of a multitude and Sarah the princess from whom kings will come, and a sign cut into the flesh: circumcision, marking the truth that God's future comes as gift, not human potency, and given to eight-day-old male infants, because belonging to God's family was never something you earn first.

Then Moriah. The details we gathered are worth keeping in exact order: a father commanded to offer "your son, your only son... whom you love" (the Bible's first use of the word love); a son old enough to carry the wood of his own sacrifice up the mountain, whose unresisting obedience the tradition has honored as willing self offering; a father's answer that has never stopped echoing, "God will provide himself the lamb"; a ram in the thicket instead; and a place name in the future tense, "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided," as if the mountain were still waiting. 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us where Moriah is: the temple mount, Jerusalem. The vacancy on that hill stays open for now.

We also took the faith and works question at full strength. Genesis 15:6 says Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness under the stars; James 2 says that scripture was "fulfilled" decades later on Moriah, and that faith without works is dead. The two are not enemies: justification begins as sheer unmerited gift (the Church teaches this as plainly as anyone), and the faith that receives it is a living seed that must flower into obedience, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). And God ended the day with an oath sworn on himself: in your seed, all nations blessed. Romans 8:32 turns the whole scene around: the Father "did not spare his own Son." What Abraham was asked for one morning, God asked of himself in full.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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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 seventy-two hours 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.

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.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

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

Genesis 22:8 (RSV2CE)

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 carefully what is done with blood.

Catechism References: CCC 145 to 146, 706, 1150, 2572

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

The exodus turned out to be an oath being kept, not a rescue improvised: "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham" (Exodus 2:24). And God gave the whole nation a family name: "Israel is my first-born son" (4:22). Then our hunt paid off: Exodus 6:7 carries the covenant formula in its fullest form yet, both halves at last, "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."

Passover taught us the anatomy of redemption: a lamb without blemish, kept inside the household four days, its blood on the doorposts, and, the requirement everyone forgets, its flesh eaten, because in God's economy sacrifice ends in communion. And Passover was commanded forward as a *zikkaron*, a memorial thicker than memory: fathers who never saw Egypt must say "what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt" (13:8), and Moses told the new generation gathered on the plains of Moab, "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us" (Deuteronomy 5:3). In Israel's liturgy the saving events become, as the Catechism puts it, in a certain way present and real (CCC 1363). A biblical memorial is something you enter, not something you look back at.

At Sinai the tribe became "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:6), an office held for the sake of all the earth, and 1 Peter 2:9 showed us the same office on the shoulders of the baptized today. Then the summit: the covenant was sealed with words read, vows spoken, and blood thrown half on the altar and half on the people, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (24:8), memorize that sentence, and it ended the way covenant-making in Scripture so often culminates, with family at table: seventy elders on the mountain, a sapphire pavement, and "they beheld God, and ate and drank."

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 must leave behind everything the senses grasp and the mind comprehends, entering the darkness where God dwells beyond all seeing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Baptismal Catecheses (Cat. 3; read in the Office of Readings, Good Friday)*

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.

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.

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)

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 while Moses is still on it, and watch what God promises to do to the human heart.

Catechism References: CCC 62 to 63, 709, 1150, 1363

SESSION 7

The Calf and the Second Law

Covenant Broken, Priesthood Narrowed, and the Law as Tutor

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

The timing was the heartbreak: while Moses was still on the mountain, with the blood of the covenant barely dry, Israel melted its gold and credited a statue with the exodus. Idolatry during the wedding. And the question we have carried since the corridor of blood in Genesis 15 stopped being hypothetical: the human side has broken the covenant that God swore both sides of. What that costs the self-sworn God, this study has still not answered. Soon.

The calf narrowed Israel's priesthood. Before it, every firstborn son was consecrated to the LORD; after it, one tribe, Levi, stood in for them all (Numbers 3:12 says "instead of every first-born" outright). Aaron's ministry had been designated before the calf (Exodus 28 to 29), so the failure did not create the priesthood; it restricted the vocation, and the restricted form carried the word interim on it from birth. And the law multiplied, not as divine temper but as divine medicine: the physician's regimen for a patient who had just shown what she does with freedom, the tutor walking the child to school until the child comes of age (Galatians 3:24). Paul, the apostle of grace himself, calls the law holy, and the commandment "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12); its limit was not moral but functional. It could command love; it could not create it.

And the Torah admitted it. Twice, in its final book, it points past itself: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me... him you shall heed" (Deuteronomy 18:15), and, after the command to circumcise your own heart proved impossible, the promise that changed surgeons: "the LORD your God will circumcise your heart... so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart" (30:6). Centuries of morning lambs and mortal priests trained a holy ache into Israel, a hunger the system was deliberately built to teach and never to satisfy. Next time, the prophets give that hunger its name.

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 promise grace without conferring it. 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 raising of children: God does not blind us with the full light at once but accustoms our eyes by degrees, subtracting idols first, then elevating sacrifice, then interiorizing the law, lest by grasping for everything immediately we lose the little we could hold. The slowness of salvation history is not reluctance; it is mercy pacing itself to the patient.

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.

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)

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 will build something together.

Catechism References: CCC 708 to 709, 1963 to 1964, 2100

SESSION 8

A House Forever

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

David offered God a house and God reversed the gift: "the LORD will make you a house" (2 Samuel 7:11), not cedar but dynasty, not architecture but sons. The terms were staggering: a kingdom and a throne "made sure for ever," and inside them, our formula, personalized: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (7:14). The vow that covered a nation at Sinai now rests on one royal man; the king carries the covenant of the whole people in his body. And it is sworn: "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant" (Psalm 89:3). Check your list from Session 4: promise one, nationhood, sworn at Sinai; promise two, the great name and royal house, sworn to David. One promise left.

We met the kingdom's most surprising office: the *gebirah*, the queen mother. Kings had many wives but one mother, so the crowned woman of the Davidic court was the king's mother: Bathsheba enthroned at Solomon's right hand, the king rising and bowing to her (1 Kings 2:19), the intercessor who carries petitions to the throne. (Solomon refused that particular petition, rightly; it was treason in disguise. The office itself stands.) Remember the office; this study is not done with it. And we built the chart with our own hands: Adam, a couple; Noah, a household; Abraham, a tribe; Moses, a nation; David, a kingdom reaching for the nations (Psalm 72:17 even echoes Genesis 12:3 over the king: "may men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed"). Then one blank row, question marks in every column.

We did not look away from the rubble: the kingdom split, the north erased, and in 587 BC Babylon burned the temple and ended the monarchy; Psalm 89 itself cries "where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?" But the covenant had always distinguished discipline from abandonment, the prophets stared at the stump and promised a shoot (Isaiah 11:1), and six centuries later an angel in Nazareth quoted the oath 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" (Luke 1:32 to 33). The wreckage did not refute the promise. It revealed its size: the "for ever" was always aimed at a Son who cannot die.

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, chapters 8-13 (esp. ch. 8, on Nathan's prophecy to David)*

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.

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.

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)

Before Next Session: Read Hosea 2:14 to 23 and Jeremiah 31:31 to 34. Watch what God calls the broken covenant relationship, and listen for our formula, badly wounded and still alive. And find your Take-Home 1 from the first week; you will need it very soon.

Catechism References: CCC 64, 436, 709, 2579

SESSION 9

A New Covenant I Will Make

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

The prophets turned out to be covenant lawyers: they summoned heaven and earth, the covenant's original witnesses, and read the indictment, and exile was the covenant's own sanctions executed, discipline inside the family, never abandonment of it. Then Hosea made the lawsuit a marriage, and we heard the worst sentence in Scripture: the child named *Lo-ammi*, "for you are not my people and I am not your God" (Hosea 1:9), our formula, the vow this whole study is named for, spoken in reverse. And we watched God do what only God does with divorce papers: plan an elopement. "I will allure her... and speak tenderly to her," a second exodus, a second honeymoon, and the formula raised from the dead: "I will say to Not my people, You are my people" (2:23).

Then the summit: the only place in the entire Old Testament that says "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31 to 34). Its four terms answer every failure we have catalogued: the law written on hearts, not stone; the formula made permanent, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people"; everyone knowing the LORD, least to greatest; and sins forgiven and remembered no more. Ezekiel added the surgical plan: clean water sprinkled, the heart of stone removed, a heart of flesh, God's own Spirit within, the promise of Deuteronomy 30:6 kept, with God holding the scalpel. And the prophets threw the doors open to the world: all nations streaming to the raised mountain, the Servant a light to the nations, the house of prayer for all peoples; the apostles would later read Hosea's reversal over the Gentiles themselves: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10).

But we also found the hole, and it is the cliffhanger of the entire Old Testament: the new covenant promises total forgiveness and names no price, no blood, no lamb, no mechanism, nothing. The covenant story has run in blood since the garments of skins, from Noah's altar to the basins of Sinai; this covenant is a check written against a deposit no one can see. The answer to how is one sentence long, and next session you will find it yourselves. BRING YOUR TAKE-HOME 1 NEXT SESSION, sealed guess intact, unread. Everything converges.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome *Commentary on Isaiah (Prologue)*

St. Jerome, who gave his life to the Hebrew Scriptures in his cave at Bethlehem, taught in the prologue to his Commentary on Isaiah that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. He read the prophets 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 placed Jeremiah 31 at the heart of his account of grace in *On the Spirit and the Letter*. 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.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Ezekiel 36:26 every day this week, slowly, turned into a personal petition (adapted from the verse): "A new heart give me, O God, and a new spirit put within me; take out of my flesh the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh."
- 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 kept: in absolution, God truly remembers your sin no more.
- 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.

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)

Before Next Session: Reread Exodus 12:1 to 14 and Exodus 24:3 to 11, nothing new. Find your Take-Home 1 and bring it with the guess still sealed. Come hungry.

Catechism References: CCC 64, 218 to 219, 1611, 1965

SESSION 10

This Cup

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

We opened our guesses, and then the text opened everything. At a Passover meal, with the lamb, the household, and the *zikkaron* all in the room, Jesus lifted a cup and spoke two texts at once. "This is MY blood of the covenant" took Moses' sentence from Sinai, the one we memorized without knowing why, and made it possessive: the mediator's own blood now binds God and the family. "This cup... is the NEW COVENANT in my blood" signed the only passage in the Old Testament that uses those words, Jeremiah 31, and filled in its famously blank price line: total forgiveness, and now we know the cost and the currency. One sentence, two covenants, the check cashed.

The Passover he began, he finished on the hill. The final cup he vowed to defer was prayed over in Gethsemane, refused on the road, and received at the end on a branch of hyssop, the Passover blood applicator of Exodus 12:22, with the words "It is finished." (The fourth cup reading is a scholarly proposal, honestly labeled, and illuminating; what John states outright is that Jesus died on the Day of Preparation of the Passover (John 19:14, 31) and that Scripture was fulfilled: "Not a bone of him shall be broken" (John 19:36), language drawn from the Passover rubric of Exodus 12:46, with an echo of Psalm 34:20. That his death coincided with the hour the lambs were slain belongs to the same interpretive chronology; the rubrics were always his description.) And the question we have carried since the corridor of blood was answered in covenant language: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). The God who swore both sides kept both sides. Through the one seed, the blessing of Abraham reached the Gentiles: the third promise, all the families of the earth, went under blood and oath at last.

Our chart is complete: couple, household, tribe, nation, kingdom, world; Sabbath, rainbow, circumcision, Passover, throne, chalice; one family, widened six times, sealed in the blood of the one who swore from the beginning. And we tested the claim that the new covenant ends sacrifice: the institution words themselves are altar words (body given, blood poured out), Paul calls the Eucharist a real participation in that body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16), and the Church's teaching honors the objection's deepest concern: the Mass adds nothing to Calvary and repeats nothing; it is the one sacrifice, once for all, made present to every generation by the covenant's own memorial mechanics, until he comes.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Smyrnaeans (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, an early second-century bishop, 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 Catecheses (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.

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.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

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

Luke 22:20 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session: Read Acts 2:1 to 47. Count the nations in the crowd, watch what Peter tells them to do, and notice the four things the first covenant family devotes itself to in the final verses.

Catechism References: CCC 610 to 611, 613, 1339 to 1340, 1365

The Family of God

Pentecost, the Church, and the Covenant Family Living Now

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

Pentecost turned out to be two reversals at once, and we computed both. Babel run backward: one language was shattered there and the nations scattered; here the nations gather and every tongue hears one gospel, Luke's list of peoples answering Genesis 11's. And a second Sinai: on the covenant's own feast day, the Spirit writes on hearts what stone once carried, and where three thousand fell after the calf (Exodus 32:28), three thousand are added at the font (Acts 2:41). Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 were not quoted at Pentecost; they were performed. Peter preached the sworn Davidic oath (citing our verse, Psalm 132:11) kept in the risen Jesus, enthroned higher than Jerusalem, and made the covenant offer that still stands: baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, "to you AND TO YOUR CHILDREN and to all that are far off": Jeremiah's forgiveness, Ezekiel's Spirit, Genesis 17's claimed infants, and the third promise reaching for the nations, in two verses.

The newborn family's life had four marks in one verse (Acts 2:42): the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers, recognizable in any parish tonight. The breaking of bread is Luke's name for the Eucharist, and Paul gave us its covenant mechanics: the cup and the bread are a real participation in Christ's blood and body, and "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." The Church is the people who never stopped eating the covenant meal; the Eucharist makes the Church. And at the first council, James answered Session 8's ache with Amos 9: the fallen tent of David "I will rebuild... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name" (Acts 15:16-17). The Church is the Davidic kingdom restored and thrown open to the world, the kingdom present now in mystery, as the Council says (Lumen Gentium 3): our chart's last row, standing in history, with an address.

We took the invisible church at full strength, honored what it guards (God alone reads hearts, and visible belonging without living faith saves no one), and answered from the whole study: every covenant came with visible signs, a visible people, and a findable table, and the family in Acts is entered by public washing, led by appointed elders, ruled by a council that binds, and disciplined by a command ("tell it to the church") that cannot be obeyed toward an invisible body. One Church, visible and invisible at once, the way a sacrament is sign and grace at once. One thing remains: the formula has not yet been spoken for the last time, and the study began at a wedding. Bring your chart and your Take-Home 1 to the final session. Everything ends where it began.

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.

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.

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)

Before Next 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.

Catechism References: CCC 751 to 752, 766, 1267, 1396

SESSION 12

The Marriage Supper

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

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

We stood, and we heard it. "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). The covenant formula, first whispered to a ninety-nine-year-old man still waiting for the promised son, expanded to a nation, personalized onto a king, reversed by Hosea into "not my people," resurrected by the prophets, and sealed over a cup in an upper room, is spoken for the last time from the throne of God, as the description of eternity, with every tear wiped away and death dead. And then it turns singular: "I will be his God and he shall be my son" (21:7). The sentence the study is named for ends addressed to you.

Scripture rang itself like a bell: it begins with a wedding in a garden and ends with the marriage supper of the Lamb (CCC 1602 says exactly this); the tree barred behind cherubim stands open in a city whose gates never shut, "and there shall no more be anything accursed"; the Lamb of Moriah and Passover stands at the center of the throne, slain and living, with a song declaring the third promise kept: ransomed for God "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The woman of Revelation 12, whom Catholic tradition has long read on several levels at once, is Israel in labor, the Church with children still, and Mary, the New Eve of Genesis 3:15, and, in the light of the restored kingdom of David, can be seen as the gebirah, the queen mother crowned beside her Son, to whom Elizabeth already spoke court language: "the mother of my Lord."

And the last mountain turned out to be under our feet. "You HAVE come to Mount Zion... to the assembly of the first-born... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood" (Hebrews 12:22 to 24): perfect tense, every Mass. The priest's words before Communion echo the wedding itself, "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9); you have been attending the feast, under veils, all along. So the study ends the way every covenant scene ended, with a meal and a sending: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come" (22:17). You now know the whole story as one story. It was given to you to give away.

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.

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.

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)

Before Next Session: There is no next session; there is the rest of your life inside this story. Reread your week one guess, write the answer beneath it in your own words, and keep the sheet in your Bible at Genesis 17. Then say Come to someone.

Catechism References: CCC 796, 1044 to 1045, 1090, 1602