

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

Session 7 • A Better Covenant • Hebrews 8

LEADER'S GUIDE • NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 • Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group hears the sermon announce its own thesis (“now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest”), discovers that the earthly sanctuary was always a copy and shadow of a heavenly original, and reads the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament: Jeremiah's new covenant oracle, with its law written on hearts, its universal knowledge of God, and its sins remembered no more, and then hears those exact words again, on Jesus' lips, over a cup.

Catholic Touchstone. “The new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20): Jeremiah's phrase, spoken by Jesus at the Supper, prayed by the Church at every consecration. Also the copy-and-shadow architecture (Exodus 25:40, “according to the pattern shown you on the mountain”), which the Catechism reads as the earthly liturgy's participation in the heavenly (CCC 1090), and an honest steelman on what “obsolete” (8:13) does and does not mean about Israel and the Old Testament.

What You Need to Know

The thesis sentence (8:1-2). Rare gift: the preacher tells us his point. “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord.” Two words deserve the room's weight. Seated: the posture question from Session 1 flickers again; note it, log it, resolve nothing (the payoff is Session 9's). Minister: *leitourgos*, the word behind liturgy: the seated king is a working liturgist; heaven's throne room is a sanctuary in use. And the We-Have inventory takes its grandest entry: we have such a high priest, and he is on duty.

Copy and shadow (8:3-5). The Levitical priests “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:40, the live discovery). The tabernacle was heaven's architecture in fabric and acacia: God showed Moses the original and commissioned a scale model. Two consequences. First, no insult to the old worship: a shadow is cast by something real, and Israel's liturgy was the truest thing on earth precisely because it copied heaven. Second, the direction of Christian worship: if the copy has given way, it gave way to the original, not to nothing: Christ ministers in “the true tent,” and the Church's liturgy, joined to his, is participation in the heavenly sanctuary (CCC 1090). Say it plainly: the Mass is not a new copy; it is the copy's retirement because the original went live.

Jeremiah 31, the longest quotation (8:8–12). The sermon proves the covenant's obsolescence the same way it proved the priesthood's: from the Old Testament's own mouth. Jeremiah, the prophet whose ministry ended in Jerusalem's death in 587 BC, delivered God's promise of "a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... not like the covenant that I made with their fathers." Walk its four promises with the group: the law put within, written on hearts (interiority: not a lower standard but a deeper address); "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (the covenant formula, kept); "all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (immediacy: covenant knowledge no longer brokered by elites); and "I will remember their sins no more" (a divine amnesty that the old sacrifices could announce but never enact: the sermon returns to this dagger in chapter 10). Then the night's hinge: where has the group heard the phrase "new covenant" before? At every Mass: "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus, holding the cup, claimed Jeremiah's oracle as his own execution and enactment. The consecration takes up tonight's chapter's quotation.

"Obsolete" (8:13), handled with the Church's precision. "In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Written, very likely, while the temple still stood; if so, within a few years the vanishing happened. The steelman meets the overreach this verse has historically fueled: if the first covenant is obsolete, is Israel discarded and the Old Testament dead weight? The Church's answer holds several precisions at once: what ages out is the Mosaic covenant as a provisional economy, above all its cultic administration of priesthood, sacrifice, and sanctuary; the whole Old Law was a holy but imperfect preparation for the Gospel (CCC 1963), fulfilled rather than trashed (Matthew 5:17); the Old Testament Scriptures retain permanent value: the Old Covenant has never been revoked as the Word of God (CCC 121–123), and the New lies hidden in the Old, the Old unveiled in the New (St. Augustine, in CCC 129); the oracle itself is addressed to Israel and Judah: the new covenant is not God changing peoples but God keeping his promise to the same people at a deeper address, into which the nations are grafted (Romans 11); and the Jewish people remain beloved, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). Supersession of the sacrificial system, yes: the sermon says so; supersession of God's fidelity, never.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 25:40. "See that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain." Moses the copyist of heaven; the live discovery grounding the copy-shadow architecture.

Jeremiah 31:31–34, in Jeremiah. Read it in its own book, with 587 BC burning in the background: the covenant promise given at the covenant's lowest hour. God announces the new marriage while the divorce papers are being served by Babylon. The context is the mercy.

Luke 22:20. "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Six centuries after Jeremiah, one night before Calvary: the oracle's enactment, held in two hands. The night's decisive live discovery.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine *Questions on the Heptateuch*

The line the Church has never improved on: the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New. The Catechism enshrines it (CCC 129) as her rule for reading: the two covenants are not rivals in a footrace but a seed and its tree, a promise and its wedding. Tonight's

chapter is the rule in action: the new covenant announced by the old covenant's own prophet.

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*

What is the New Law, the Angelic Doctor asks, and answers with Jeremiah in hand: the New Law is chiefly the grace of the Holy Spirit itself, given to believers: written not on stone but infused into hearts. The documents and commandments of the Gospel are secondary; the law within is the Spirit himself. The Catechism makes his answer its own (CCC 1965–1966): tonight's oracle, made systematic.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*

On the copy and the shadow, the golden-mouthed preacher lifts his hearers' eyes: the priest stands below, but the sacrifice is of things in the heavens; what appears on the altar is enrolled among the realities above, for our high priest ministers in the true tabernacle. Do not judge the liturgy by what the eye reports, he urges: the eye sees the copy's furniture; faith sees the original in use.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1090. In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy, where Christ is minister (leitourgos) of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle: the Catechism citing tonight's very verse (8:2) for the Church's whole theology of worship.

CCC 1965–1966. The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ, the interior law of charity: the Catechism quoting Jeremiah 31 and St. Thomas together. The law written on hearts, defined.

CCC 121–123, 129. The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Scripture, its books divinely inspired and of permanent value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked; and the Church reads the two Testaments by Augustine's rule. The steelman's guardrails.

CCC 1365. In the Eucharist Christ gives the very body he gave up for us and the blood of the new covenant poured out for many: Jeremiah's phrase, at the altar, tonight's hinge as doctrine. (Keep the once-for-all pairing pocketed; next session spends it.)

Thread Watch

THREAD 3 · THE WE-HAVE INVENTORY (LEADER ONLY: GRAND ENTRY)

"We have such a high priest, seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (8:1). The list now reads: a great high priest; an anchor; such a high priest, seated and serving. Keep it private; the final entry is five weeks out.

THE SEATED SON (DORMANT, FLICKERS TONIGHT)

8:1 repeats the posture: seated. If anyone recalls their Session 1 guess about why he sat down, honor

the memory and resolve nothing: “The sermon keeps saying it. It will tell us why, soon.” Two sessions.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC: DOUBLE SCORE)

8:6 pays twice in one verse: a better covenant, enacted on better promises. Board runs to six or seven, depending on the 7:7 ruling. The group should feel the theme compounding: better hope, better covenant, better promises, and the sermon is not done.

Session Goals

1. The thesis lands: we have such a high priest, seated and serving as leitourgos in the true tent.
2. The copy-shadow architecture is discovered from Exodus 25:40, and the direction of Christian worship follows from it.
3. Jeremiah's four promises are walked in their own context: interiority, covenant formula, immediacy, amnesty.
4. The Luke 22:20 hinge fires: the consecration quotes the oracle, and the group hears it forever after.
5. The obsolescence steelman is answered with the Church's full set of precisions: fulfilled cult, permanent Scriptures, irrevocable gifts.

Time Note

Built for 75 to 90 minutes. If the night runs short, compress the mediator question (Question 4) into the thesis discussion and cut the Dig Deeper, in that order. Do not cut the Exodus 25:40 discovery (Question 2), the Jeremiah walk (Questions 5 and 6), or the Luke 22:20 hinge (Question 7). Cap the steelman (Question 8) at fifteen minutes. No ANSWER box is a script.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, you showed Moses the pattern on the mountain, and you have shown us the Priest in the true tent. Write your law where you promised to write it: not over our heads but within our hearts. Let us know you tonight, from the least of us to the greatest, and remember our sins no more, as you swore by your prophet and sealed in the cup of your Son. Through the mediator of the new covenant. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Have you ever seen the original of something you had only known in copies: a painting, a place, a person you had only seen on a screen? What did the original have that the copy could not carry?

W2. Homework check: who is quoted in the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, and of the things God promises in it, which one would you least want to live without?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 8:1–2

1. The preacher does something rare: he announces his own thesis. “Now the point in what we are saying is this.” What is the point, in his words? And weigh the two surprises in it: the posture (where have we been told to watch that word?), and the job title: he is a minister (leitourgos, the word behind liturgy) in the sanctuary. What is the seated king doing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The point: we have such a high priest, seated at the right hand of the Majesty, ministering in the true tent pitched by the Lord, not man. Seated: the Session 1 question flickers again: priests famously did their work standing, and the sermon keeps insisting this one sat down. Log it once more; the answer is close now. And leitourgos: the enthroned Son is not in repose; he is in service: heaven's throne room is a sanctuary in use, and the King's present occupation is liturgy. Which means, mark it well, that at any hour you pray, you are not initiating contact; you are joining a service already in progress. (Leader: the We-Have inventory just took its grandest entry.)

SPOILER GUARD: The seated posture is noted and banked again, not resolved. Session 9 owns the payoff; protect it.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 8:3–5

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find and read Exodus 25:40, and its neighbor 25:9.

2. What was Moses shown on the mountain, and what was he told to do with it? So what was the tabernacle, all along: whose architecture, at what scale? And Hebrews 8:5 draws the conclusion: what do the Levitical priests serve?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses was shown a pattern (a model, an original) and commanded to copy it exactly: the tabernacle was heaven's architecture executed in fabric, wood, and gold: a scale model of the true sanctuary. The Levitical priests, therefore, "serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary": real service, real holiness, and derivative by design, the way a blueprint is honored by the building it points to. No insult hides in the word shadow: shadows are cast only by something real standing in the light. Israel's worship was the truest thing on earth precisely because it was traced from heaven.

3. Now run the logic forward. If the earthly tent was the copy, and Christ now ministers in "the true tent" (8:2), what has Christian worship moved into? When Catholics say the Mass joins the heavenly liturgy (CCC 1090 cites this very verse), are we claiming to have built a better copy, or something else entirely?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Something else entirely: not a better copy but the copy's retirement, because the original went live. Christ, our leitourgos, serves in the true sanctuary; the Church's liturgy is joined to his, so the Mass is not a new scale model of heaven: it is participation in the heavenly sanctuary itself, through the priest who is physically there. The direction of worship reversed at the Ascension: Israel built upward from a pattern; the Church is drawn upward into the original. St. John Chrysostom's counsel applies every Sunday: the eye reports the copy's furniture; faith sees the original in use.

4. 8:6: his ministry is "as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises." (Tally: twice in one verse.) What is a mediator of a covenant: what does the job involve, and what did Moses' version of it look like (think Sinai: blood, words, people)? Why does a better covenant need a better mediator?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A mediator stands between the parties and makes the covenant actual: Moses carried God's words down and the people's pledge up, threw the blood of the covenant on altar and people (Exodus 24), and interceded when the covenant was broken before its ink dried. A covenant is only as good as its go-between: Moses could deliver terms but not keep them for anyone, could sprinkle blood but not blood that changed hearts. The new covenant's promises (hearts rewritten, sins forgotten) are beyond any courier's power; they require a mediator who is himself both parties' pledge: God's own Son, and our own flesh: the guarantor of Session 6, upgraded to mediator. Better promises demanded a mediator who could not fail either side.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 8:7–9

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find Jeremiah 31:31–34 and read it there, in Jeremiah, and tell the room what is happening to Jerusalem in Jeremiah's lifetime.

5. When does God announce the new covenant: at a covenant high point, or at the lowest hour in the old covenant's history? And notice the fault line in 8:8–9: what went wrong with the first covenant: does the fault lie with the covenant itself (8:7, not “faultless”), with the people (“they did not continue in my covenant”), or both? Why does that diagnosis dictate the design of the new one?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jeremiah's book sets the promise against Jerusalem's dying: the neighboring chapter (Jeremiah 32) is dated to the siege itself, 587 BC, Babylon at the walls, the temple about to burn: God announces the new marriage while the divorce is being executed. The covenant promise is given at the covenant's funeral, which is the purest mercy in the Old Testament. And the fault runs on two levels. Hebrews 8:7 says the first covenant was not “faultless”: good and God-given, it was provisional, unable to produce the perfection it pointed to. And 8:8 says God “finds fault with them”: the partners broke it; the law was holy and the hearts were stone. So the new covenant's design goes where the failure lived: if hearts are the point of breakage, the new covenant will be installed in hearts. God's answer to human unreliability was not lower standards; it was deeper delivery.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 8:10–12, slowly

6. Walk the four promises: the law within, written on hearts; “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”; “all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest”; “I will remember their sins no more.” Take them one at a time: what does each actually promise, and which of the four could the old covenant's machinery (stone tablets, priests, sacrifices) announce but never produce?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The law within: not a lighter law but a deeper address: God's will infused as inclination, which the Church, following St. Thomas, identifies as the grace of the Holy Spirit himself (CCC 1965–1966): the New Law is chiefly a Person poured in, and the commandments become the shape love naturally takes. The formula: I their God, they my people: Sinai's own wedding vow, kept, not replaced. All shall know me: covenant knowledge unbrokered: not the abolition of teachers but the end of second-hand religion: every baptized soul given its own access to God, the Spirit's indwelling received at baptism and kept alive by grace, least to greatest. And the amnesty: sins remembered no more: which is the one the old machinery could announce annually and never enact: the sacrifices reminded (the sermon will drive this dagger in chapter 10) but never removed. Divine forgetting is not amnesia; it is the omnipotent refusal to hold the file. All four run on the fourth: hearts cannot be rewritten while the record still stands.

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find and read Luke 22:20.

7. Six centuries after Jeremiah, on the night before his death, Jesus lifts a cup and says what? Where did that phrase come from, and where do you hear it echoed, in almost the same words, every week? What did Jesus claim, in one sentence, about tonight's entire oracle?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” The phrase is Jeremiah’s, and Jesus, holding the cup, claimed the whole oracle as his to enact: the covenant God promised at Jerusalem’s funeral is cut in his blood at Jerusalem’s Passover. And the Church has never stopped saying it: at every consecration, “the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you.” You have heard tonight’s chapter quoted at every Mass of your life: the Eucharist is Jeremiah 31 with an altar. Every worthy Communion writes the law a line deeper and gives the knowledge a shade more directly; it cleanses venial sins and strengthens us against future sin (CCC 1393-1394), while mortal sin still needs the tribunal of confession first: the new covenant, administered.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 8:13

8. Now tonight’s steelman, and it is really an overreach to be steered between. Reading one: “obsolete means obsolete: the Old Testament is dead weight, Israel is discarded, the Church replaced her.” Reading two, the opposite ditch: “nothing changed; the covenants just sit side by side.” Give each its best case: the first has this verse’s plain vocabulary; the second guards God’s fidelity. Then bring the precisions: what exactly grew obsolete, what remains permanent, to whom is the oracle addressed, and what does Paul say about the gifts and call of God?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The first reading’s strength: the verse really says obsolete, aging, ready to vanish, and, if the sermon predates the year 70 as many scholars hold, within a few years the temple and its sacrifices did vanish: the sermon meant it. The second reading’s strength: a God who discards covenant partners cannot be trusted with a new covenant either: if he broke faith with Israel, our anchor is sand. The Church threads it with several precisions held at once. What ages out is the Mosaic covenant as a provisional economy, most visibly its cultic administration: priesthood, sacrifices, sanctuary. The whole Old Law was a holy but imperfect preparation (CCC 1963), fulfilled, not trashed (“I have come not to abolish but to fulfill,” Matthew 5:17): a scaffold honored by being no longer needed once the cathedral stands. What remains permanent: the Old Testament Scriptures, divinely inspired, of abiding value: the Old Covenant as God’s word has never been revoked (CCC 121–123), and the Church reads by Augustine’s rule: the New hidden in the Old, the Old unveiled in the New. And the addressees: read 8:8 again: the new covenant is made “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah”: God did not change peoples; he kept his promise to the same people at a deeper address, and grafted the nations into their olive tree (Romans 11:17–24). The Jewish people remain beloved, “for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). Supersession of the sacrificial system: yes, the sermon insists on it. Supersession of God’s fidelity: never: that reading would saw off the branch every Christian sits on.

DIG DEEPER

“Ready to vanish away” (8:13): if Hebrews was written before the year 70, this line is prophecy on a countdown: the temple still stood as the ink dried, and within a few years Rome burned it, and the

Levitical sacrifices ceased, never to resume. Ask the group, if there is breath: what would it have been like to hear this sermon in 68 AD, and then hear the news from Jerusalem in 70? The congregation tempted to drift back to the temple was, within months, a congregation with no temple to drift back to. Sometimes God retires the scaffolding for us.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. “I will remember their sins no more.” Whose ledger are you still keeping: your own, or someone else's? What would it cost to practice divine forgetting toward one entry this week?

S2. “All shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” Where has your faith been running second-hand: on someone else's knowledge of God rather than your own? What is one first-hand appointment you will make this week?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. At Mass this week, listen for Jeremiah at the consecration: “the new and eternal covenant.” Answer it interiorly with one line of the oracle: “write it on my heart.”
2. Practice the amnesty: choose one recorded grievance, yours against another or against yourself, and formally close the file, once, out loud, before God. Closing the file means surrendering the grievance to God, not pretending harm never happened; where there is ongoing hurt or abuse, keep wise boundaries, tell the truth, and seek the help you need.
3. Read Hebrews 9 before next session, twice if you can. Bring every question you have ever carried, or been asked, about the Mass and the words once for all. Next session is built for them, and nothing is off the table.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 8:1 (RSV2CE)

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Mediator of the new covenant, minister of the true sanctuary: write the law within us, be our God as we are your people, let each of us know you first-hand, and remember our sins no more. We have such a high priest; teach our hearts what our lips just said. Through the same Christ our Lord, whose cup is the covenant. Amen.

Part 3 · Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 7, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 8:1–2 · 8:3–5 · 8:6 · 8:7–12 · 8:13

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Exodus 25:40 and 25:9 (the pattern) · Jeremiah 31:31–34, read in Jeremiah · Luke 22:20 (the cup)

STEELMAN PASSAGES (QUESTION 8)

Hebrews 8:13 (the objection's text) · Matthew 5:17 · Romans 11:17–24, 29 · CCC 121–123, 129

LEADER BACKGROUND

Exodus 24:3–8 (Moses the mediator) · 2 Kings 25 (587 BC, for Jeremiah's context) · 1 Corinthians 11:25

CATECHISM

CCC 1090 · CCC 1965–1966 · CCC 121–123, 129 · CCC 1365

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 8:1

NEXT SESSION

Session 8 covers Hebrews 9: the tabernacle tour, the Day of Atonement, and the summit steelman of the whole study: once for all, and the Mass. Prepare with extra care; participants were told to bring their hardest questions.