

The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7 and 26

90 minutes • Win, Build, Send inductive format

SESSION OVERVIEW

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

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

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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

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

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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

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

CATECHISM CONNECTION

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

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY · NEVER APPEARS IN PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

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

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

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

SESSION GOALS

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

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

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

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

The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7 and 26

OPENING PRAYER

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

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

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

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

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY (55 MIN)

READ JEREMIAH 7:1-4 ALOUD.

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

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

Steelman: Is Mary the Queen of Heaven Jeremiah Condemned?

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

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

READ JEREMIAH 7:21-23 ALOUD.

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

DIG DEEPER · NOT LESS LITURGY, TRUER LITURGY

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

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

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

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

church door on your way out?

SEND · CLOSING QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

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

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

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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

CLOSING PRAYER

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

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

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

Every Passage in This Session

Jeremiah 7 and 26

Primary Text

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

Old Testament Roots

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

New Testament Fulfillment

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

Catechism

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