

The Stump of Jesse

Isaiah 10-12 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants watch a forest fall: proud Assyria, the axe that boasted against the hand that swung it, and the house of David itself, cut down to a stump. Then they discover the shoot: one green twig from Jesse's dead-looking stump, resting under the sevenfold Spirit, and they resolve the seed Isaiah planted in Session 2: *the holy seed is its stump*. They trace the seven gifts to their source in this chapter, find the Spirit visibly *resting* on the son of David at the Jordan, and end where chapter 12 ends: singing, drawing water from the wells of a salvation whose Hebrew name they will recognize.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

Confirmation. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the Church's Confirmation prayer (prayed, in the ordinary Latin-rite celebration, by the bishop) come from Isaiah 11:2, and the Catechism cites this verse by name (CCC 1831). Most confirmed Catholics have never met their own gifts in their native habitat. Tonight they do.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapter 10 completes the Assyria arc with one of Scripture's great images of the pride of empires: Assyria is merely the axe and rod in God's hand for judgment (10:5, 15), but the axe has begun to boast, "*Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it?*" When the tool claims to be the craftsman, the tool gets retired. Verses 33-34 announce it in forest terms: the LORD "*will lop the boughs with terrifying power... and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.*" Every towering thing goes down.

Then the pivot the whole first third of the book has been waiting for. Assyria falls like a forest never to rise; and out of a different felled tree, the house of David, reduced by exile to a stump, comes one live shoot: "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse*" (11:1). Note the name: not the stump of David but of Jesse, David's father, as if the dynasty must go back behind its royal grandeur to its Bethlehem root and start again, small. This resolves Session 2's plant: *the holy seed is its stump* (6:13). God's future was hiding inside the judgment the whole time.

On the gifts, be precise and honest, because precision here builds trust. The Hebrew of 11:2 names six: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the LORD. The Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate render the doubled Hebrew *fear of the LORD* with two words, adding *piety*, which gives the traditional seven the Church prays at Confirmation. The Catechism cites Isaiah 11:1-2 for the seven gifts (CCC 1831), receiving the verse through the Church's own ancient versions. That is not an embarrassment; it is a small window into how Scripture lives in Tradition.

Chapter 11 then paints the shoot's reign: he judges the poor with righteousness (not by appearances, 11:3-5), and creation itself disarms: wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, the child over the adder's den (11:6-

9), Eden's ceasefire. Verse 10 universalizes it: the root of Jesse stands as an *ensign*, a battle standard, and *the nations* seek him. Chapter 12 is the response: the first full hymn of the book, six verses of thanksgiving, with a wordplay hiding in plain sight: “*God is my salvation... he has become my salvation*” (12:2), Hebrew *yeshuah*. The name Jesus, *Yeshua*, is built on this word: *the LORD saves*. When the group sings chapter 12, they are one consonant from saying his name.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Jesse of Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16): the shoot's name reaches back to David's anointing, where the Spirit “*came mightily upon David from that day forward*” (16:13). The sevenfold Spirit of 11:2 is the Spirit of that anointing in fullness. The peaceable kingdom of 11:6-9 evokes Eden restored (Genesis 1-2), and the *ensign* for the nations picks up 2:2-4, the mountain to which the nations stream.

Fulfillment. At the Jordan the Spirit descends “*and remained on him*” (John 1:32-33; Matthew 3:16): the resting of Isaiah 11:2 made visible, which the Catechism connects to Christ's anointing as Messiah (CCC 536). Paul closes his argument in Romans by quoting Isaiah 11:10 from the Septuagint: “*the root of Jesse shall come... in him shall the Gentiles hope*” (Romans 15:12). Revelation gives the shoot the last word in the Bible: “*I am the root and the offspring of David*” (22:16). And the wells of salvation (12:3) open in John 4 and John 7:37-39, where Jesus stands up at the feast and cries, “*If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.*”

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome • *Commentary on Isaiah, on 11:1*

St. Jerome, reading the Latin of this verse, *a rod (virga) from the root of Jesse*, hears the Virgin (*virgo*) in the very sound of the word: the rod from Jesse's root is the Virgin Mary, and the flower that rises from it is Christ. The wordplay is Latin, but the instinct is exegesis: the shoot does not appear without the stem that bears him, and the dynasty reborn from Jesse's stump comes into the world through a daughter of that house.

St. Gregory the Great • *Moralia on Job*

St. Gregory arranges the seven gifts of Isaiah 11 as a ladder. The Spirit's list runs downward from wisdom to fear of the LORD, he observes, because that is how heaven descends to meet us; but the soul climbs it upward, beginning at holy fear and rising step by step, through piety, knowledge, might, counsel, and understanding, to wisdom, which is the summit: to taste and see the Lord. The gifts are not a trophy case; they are a staircase.

St. Cyril of Alexandria • *Commentary on Isaiah, on 11:10*

Commenting on the root of Jesse raised as an ensign, St. Cyril sees the standard around which a scattered world at last rallies: Christ lifted up, drawing not one nation but the nations into one army of peace. What Isaiah promised as a sign for peoples far off, Cyril reads as the daily fact of the Church, where Gentiles who once knew nothing of Jesse's house now hope in Jesse's root.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1831.** The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, and the Catechism's citation for them is Isaiah 11:1-2. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David, and complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them.
- **CCC 536.** At his baptism, the Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to rest on him: Isaiah 11:2 at the Jordan, the anointing that shows him the Christ.
- **CCC 712.** The Book of Emmanuel closes here; the Catechism's own citation for the awaited Messiah's traits is *especially Isaiah 11:1-2*. Tonight the group finishes the section the Catechism singles out.
- **CCC 671-674.** The kingdom already inaugurated, not yet consummated: the frame for tonight's steelman on the unfulfilled peace.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The holy seed: resolved. Session 2 planted *the holy seed is its stump* (6:13). Tonight 11:1 sprouts it. Let a participant make the connection before you do; if no one does, ask what they remember about stumps.

The nations / light. The root stands as an ensign and *the nations seek him* (11:10): the light thread and the nations thread braid together. Two more stations remain (42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). Do not resolve.

Zion and the Holy One. Chapter 12 ends the Book of Emmanuel with the Holy One of Israel “*in your midst, O inhabitant of Zion*” (12:6). The title from the seraphim's hymn now dwells inside the city. Note it aloud; resolution still to come.

The sealed guess. Do not mention it tonight. It stays sealed until Session 11.

SESSION GOALS

1. Trace the axe oracle (10:5-19) and articulate its doctrine of providence: empires as instruments, pride as self-retirement.
2. Resolve the holy seed thread: from 6:13 to the shoot of 11:1.
3. Meet the seven gifts in Isaiah 11:2, honestly explaining the six-to-seven history, and connect them to Confirmation (CCC 1831).
4. Discover the Spirit resting on the son of David at the Jordan (Matthew 3:16; John 1:32-33).
5. Run the unfulfilled-peace steelman with full respect and answer it with the already/not-yet and Romans 15:12.
6. Find the *yeshuah* wordplay in 12:2 and close by praying chapter 12 as the group's own hymn.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse,

Take-Home, closing prayer with chapter 12, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 2 (the remnant, 10:20-23) first; compress Question 7 (peaceable kingdom imagery) second. Never cut the stump resolution, the gifts, the Jordan discovery, or the steelman.

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Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit: Spirit of wisdom and understanding, Spirit of counsel and might, Spirit of knowledge, of piety, and of the fear of the LORD.

You rested in fullness on the shoot from Jesse's stump; rest tonight on us, on whom you were sealed at Confirmation. Where our lives look like stumps, show us the holy seed.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about something in your life that looked finished, dead, over, and later turned out to have life still in it.
2. Quick inventory, no wrong answers: can you name any of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit from your Confirmation? (Do not correct or complete the list yet; tonight the group will find them at their source.)

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Axe That Boasted (Isaiah 10:5-19, 33-34)

1. Read Isaiah 10:5-7 and 10:15. What does God call Assyria, the superpower currently terrorizing the world? And what has the tool started to do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

“Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury.” The empire that thinks it is making history is, in God’s accounting, a hand tool: an axe, a rod, a saw (v. 15). But the axe has begun to vaunt itself over him who hews with it; Assyria believes its conquests are its own genius (10:8-14). Verse 15 is the whole theology of empires in one question: does the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? God can use a proud power without approving it, and when the tool claims to be the craftsman, the tool gets retired. This is providence without fatalism: Assyria acts freely and wickedly, and God writes it into a sentence Assyria never read.

2. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read 10:20-23. A word from Session 3 walks back on stage, and it was a child’s name. What returns, and what does it now mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The remnant. *“A remnant will return... to the mighty God”* (10:21), and Shear-jashub, the boy Isaiah brought to meet Ahaz, means exactly that: *a remnant shall return*. The sermon Ahaz ignored becomes national policy. Note two things: the remnant returns to *El Gibbor*, Mighty God, the very title given to the child of 9:6; and the remnant idea cuts both ways, severe (only a remnant) and merciful (surely a remnant). God’s judgments always leave a stump with a seed in it, which is

precisely where tonight is going.

The Shoot (Isaiah 10:33-11:5)

3. Read 10:33-34 and then 11:1 in one breath. What falls, and what rises? And someone check your notes from Session 2: what was the last line of Isaiah 6?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Lebanon's majestic forest, the proud and (on the common reading) Assyria in tree form, is felled by the LORD. Then, against that skyline of felled giants: *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse."* One green twig from a cut-down tree. The contrast is the point: empires fall like forests and stay down; God's people fall and sprout.

And the Session 2 seed resolves: *"the holy seed is its stump"* (6:13). The stump was never mere wreckage; it was a seed vault. David's dynasty, humiliated to nothing, cut back past its royal grandeur to plain Jesse of Bethlehem, holds the future of the world in its rings. Write the connection Isaiah invites in the margin: 6:13 – 11:1. When God lets something in your life be cut down, look for what he has preserved inside the stump.

4. Read 11:2-3a. What rests on the shoot, and what is the list? Count carefully in your own Bible, then compare with the seven gifts you named (or could not name) at the start of tonight.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him": not visit, rest, take up residence. The list in the Hebrew text: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD, with fear of the LORD doubled in verses 2-3. That is six. The ancient Greek and Latin Bibles of the Church rendered the doubled *fear of the LORD* with two distinct words, adding *piety*, and that sevenfold form is the one the Church has prayed for two thousand years and the one prayed over you at your Confirmation. The Catechism's citation for the seven gifts is this very verse (CCC 1831).

Say the honest part plainly, because it builds trust rather than eroding it: the traditional seven come to us through the Septuagint and Vulgate, the Church's own Scriptures, not from a miscount. It is a live example of how the Word of God is carried in the Church's Tradition. And notice whose gifts they are first: they rest in fullness on the Messiah, and are given to us as a share in *his* anointing. Confirmation is not a graduation; it is being fitted with the equipment of the Christ.

DIG DEEPER • Gregory's Ladder

St. Gregory the Great noticed the direction of the list: it runs downward, wisdom first, fear of the LORD last, because that is how heaven descends to us. But the soul climbs it the other way: begin at the fear of the LORD, reverence before the Holy One (your group met it in Session 2, faces covered, shoes off), then piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, understanding, and at the top, wisdom, which for Gregory is the taste of God himself. Try praying the gifts as a staircase this week, one step per day, and see where you actually stall.

The Peaceable Kingdom and the Ensign (Isaiah 11:6-10)

5. Read 11:3b-5. How does this king judge, and what does he wear?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Not by what his eyes see or his ears hear: no verdicts by appearance, spin, or lobbying. He judges the *poor* with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek, the two groups every human court quietly discounts. His war gear is character: righteousness the belt of his waist, faithfulness the belt of his loins. Paul echoes the wardrobe for the whole Church, girding with truth and giving righteousness as the breastplate (Ephesians 6:14). If your group is weary of leaders judged by optics, verses 3-5 read like cold water in the desert.

6. Read 11:6-9 slowly and let the pictures land: wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion, the nursing child over the asp's hole. What is being reversed here, and how far does verse 9 extend it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eden is being reversed back into place: predation, venom, and fear, the wreckage of the fall, stand down; a little child leads the demilitarized zoo. Verse 9 gives the mechanism and the extent: none shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, "*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*" Compare the seraphim's claim in 6:3 that the whole earth is full of his glory: what heaven already sees, earth will one day know. Peace, for Isaiah, is not the absence of conflict but the saturation of creation with the knowledge of God.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the serious objection, and it deserves your best voice, because it is the historic Jewish case against Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, argued in good faith for two millennia:

Look out the window. Isaiah says the Messiah's reign brings wolves lying with lambs, swords into plowshares (2:4), the earth full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. The prophets give checkable criteria: universal peace, universal knowledge of God, the world visibly repaired. Twenty centuries after Jesus, there is war, unbelief, and venom in abundance; Christians themselves have waged wars. Therefore, on the prophets' own test, the Messiah has not yet come; and reinterpreting the criteria after the fact is moving the goalposts. Classical Jewish teaching presses essentially this test; Maimonides, for instance, made verifiable restoration the Messiah's credential, even while reading the wolf-and-lamb imagery itself as figurative. It is not a cheap argument.

Give it its full weight. Then press the text with the next question.

7. Answer from inside Isaiah 11 itself. Look at the sequence of the chapter: what comes at verse 1, and what at verses 6-9? Then read verse 10 and ask the historical question: has anything in verse 10 checkably happened? (Keep Romans 15:12 ready.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First, honor the objection: it is honest, it takes the prophets seriously, and Session 1's guardrail still stands: the gifts and the call of God to Israel are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). But watch Isaiah's own sequence. Verse 1 is a small, datable, historical event: a shoot appears from Jesse's stump, one descendant, born in time. Verses 6-9 are creation-wide consummation. Isaiah paints them on one canvas, but he has already trained us (Session 3) to expect horizons: a near installment and a full payment. The Church's claim is not that everything in chapter 11 has happened; it is that verse 1 has, verse 2 visibly so at the Jordan, and that verses 6-9 name what his kingdom is still growing

toward. Already inaugurated, not yet consummated (CCC 671-674): the kingdom present like leaven, its universal peace awaiting his return, which is why the Church cannot stop saying *thy kingdom come* and *come, Lord Jesus*.

Second, verse 10 offers a checkable middle criterion, and it is the one Paul chose: the root of Jesse raised as an ensign, *the nations* seeking him. Has one son of Jesse's felled house, in fact, become the rallying standard of the Gentile world? Empirically, astonishingly, yes: this room full of Gentiles studying Jesse's family tree on a weeknight is itself evidence; St. Cyril already pointed to the same fact in the fifth century. Paul closes Romans by quoting exactly this verse: *in him shall the Gentiles hope* (Romans 15:12). The wolf and the lamb are not yet fully at peace; but the nations are already at the ensign, which is precisely the part of the oracle a first-installment fulfillment should show. The objection sees rightly that the story is unfinished; faith adds that it has verifiably begun.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Isaiah 11:2 says the Spirit will *rest* on the shoot of Jesse. There is a day in the Gospels when that resting became visible, in public, over water, and John the Baptist says the resting is how he recognized him. Find it: Matthew 3 or John 1. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 3:16: at Jesus' baptism the heavens open and the Spirit of God descends like a dove "*and alighting on him*." John 1:32-33 makes the resting the very sign: "*He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he*." Remain: Isaiah's word made visible. The Catechism reads the Jordan as the manifestation of the anointing Jesus possessed from his conception (CCC 536): the sevenfold Spirit resting on the son of David for all to see. And your Confirmation was your personal share in that scene: the same Spirit, the same gifts, sealed on you to equip you for mission, which is where this whole study's title has been pointing.

The First Hymn (Isaiah 12)

8. Read all of chapter 12 aloud together; it is six verses, the first full hymn of the book. Verse 2 says "*he has become my salvation*." The Hebrew word for salvation there is *yeshuah*. Say it out loud. What name is hiding in it, and what does 12:6 do with our oldest thread?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Yeshuah: salvation. The name *Yeshua*, Jesus, is built on this root and means *the LORD saves*, which is exactly how the angel explains the name in Matthew 1:21: "*you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*." When Isaiah sings *God has become my yeshuah*, he is one breath away from the holy Name; the Fathers loved to hear it there, and once you hear it you cannot unhear it. Verse 3, "*with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*," opens toward Jesus at the well (John 4) and Jesus at the feast: "*If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink*" (John 7:37).

And verse 6 gathers the threads: "*Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel*." The title from the seraphim's hymn (Session 2) is now located in *the midst* of the city (Session 1's Zion thread): the thrice-holy One dwelling among his people. Emmanuel, sung. Keep tracking both threads; neither is finished.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Which of the seven gifts, honestly, is the one your life is currently running lowest on: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the LORD? What would this month look like if you asked for it daily and expected it to be given?
2. Name the stump: an area of your life, or of someone you love, that has been cut down and looks finished. What would it mean, practically, to treat it as a place where God preserves a holy seed rather than as proof he is done?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Gregory's ladder: one gift per day for seven days, starting at fear of the LORD and climbing to wisdom. One sentence each morning: *Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of ____, rest on me.*
- If you have not thought about your Confirmation since it happened, tell the Lord so plainly, and ask him to activate what was sealed. If you have not been confirmed, talk to your leader this week; the gifts have your name on them.
- Read Isaiah 12 aloud once, alone, as your own prayer, and when you reach *he has become my yeshuah*, say the Name.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him."

Isaiah 11:1-2 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you fell forests and you keep stumps. Every proud axe in history has ended in your woodpile, and every hope you plant survives the saw.

Send the sevenfold Spirit who rests on the Root of Jesse to rest on us: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge, piety, and holy fear. Make our confirmed lives look confirmed.

And with joy let us draw water from the wells of salvation, for great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 22:15-25. It is eleven verses about a man losing his job. Bring your questions; it may be the most surprising night of the study.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 10:5-19 (Assyria the axe; the boast of the tool; vv. 5-7, 15 read aloud)
- Isaiah 10:20-23 (the remnant returns to El Gibbor; optional)
- Isaiah 10:33-34 (the forest felled)
- Isaiah 11:1 (the shoot from the stump of Jesse)
- Isaiah 11:2-3a (the Spirit rests; the gifts)
- Isaiah 11:3b-5 (how the shoot judges; the belts)
- Isaiah 11:6-9 (the peaceable kingdom; knowledge covering the earth)
- Isaiah 11:10 (the root as ensign; the nations seek him)
- Isaiah 12:1-6 (the first hymn; yeshuah; the Holy One in Zion's midst)

Live Discovery Target

- Matthew 3:16 and John 1:32-33 (the Spirit descends and remains at the Jordan)

Supporting Passages

- Isaiah 6:13 (the holy seed is its stump; the Session 2 plant, resolved)
- 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Jesse of Bethlehem; the Spirit comes upon David)
- Ephesians 6:14 (Isaiah's wardrobe rearranged for the Church: truth girds the loins, righteousness is the breastplate)
- Romans 15:12 (Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10; in him shall the Gentiles hope)
- Revelation 22:16 (the root and offspring of David)
- Matthew 1:21 (the name Jesus explained); John 4:10-14; 7:37-39 (the wells)
- Romans 11:29 (the irrevocable call; steelman guardrail from Session 1)

Catechism

- CCC 1831 (the seven gifts; cites Isaiah 11:1-2)
- CCC 536 (the Spirit rests on Jesus at his baptism)
- CCC 712 (the Book of Emmanuel, especially Isaiah 11:1-2)
- CCC 671-674 (the kingdom already inaugurated, not yet consummated)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 11:1-2a (RSV2CE)