

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

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

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

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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

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

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

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

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

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

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

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

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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

CATECHISM CONNECTION

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

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

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

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

THREAD WATCH

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

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

SESSION GOALS

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

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

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

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

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

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

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

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

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

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

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

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

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

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

DIG DEEPER **Eden Is a Sanctuary**

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

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

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

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

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

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

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

Live It This Week

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

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

Closing Prayer

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

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Psalm 105:8 (RSV2CE)

SESSION 1

Cut a Covenant

Creation, Adam, and the Sabbath Sign

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

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

Core Passages (in order of use)

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

Supporting Passages

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