

SESSION 2

The Serpent and the Seed

The Fall as Covenant Breach and the First Gospel

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Genesis 3 unfolds like a covenant lawsuit and a covenant promise in the same chapter: the bond is broken from the human side, yet inside the very curse on the serpent God plants the first promise of a Redeemer born of a woman.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church calls Genesis 3:15 the *Protoevangelium*, "the first gospel," the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer and of the New Eve (CCC 410 to 411).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If Session 1 established that Eden is covenant ground, then Genesis 3 is best read as covenant breach, not merely rule breaking, a reading Scripture itself invites (Hosea 6:7, "like Adam they transgressed the covenant") and Catholic biblical theology has richly developed, though it is an interpretive framework rather than defined doctrine. Adam was given a command with a sanction attached ("in the day that you eat of it you shall die," Genesis 2:17), which is the structure of covenant stipulation and curse. The tragedy is relational before it is legal: the son distrusts the Father, the priest fails to guard the sanctuary, the bridegroom stands silent while the bride is deceived (note Genesis 3:6, "her husband, who was with her").

Watch the serpent's strategy, because it never changes. He begins by misquoting God ("Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree?"), then flatly contradicts him ("You will not die"), then reframes the covenant as a contract rigged against them ("God knows that... you will be like God"). The lie is that the Father is really an employer hoarding wages. The first sin is believing a slander against God's fatherhood, and every sin since has the same root.

The word *nachash* (serpent) is milder than the reality. Elsewhere Scripture uses serpent and dragon language for the great enemy (Job 26:13, Isaiah 27:1), and Revelation 12:9 removes all doubt: "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan." Adam, whose task was to "keep" or guard the garden (Session 1), should have confronted the intruder even at the cost of his life. He did not, and a greater Adam eventually will.

Then comes the astonishing turn. God's first recorded response to human sin is not a curse on the man or the woman (read carefully: the serpent and the ground are cursed, the humans are disciplined but not cursed), and before any discipline is spoken, God embeds a promise in the sentence against the serpent: "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). Three things deserve slow attention. First, "the seed of the woman" is odd; Scripture normally reckons seed through the man, so a decisive descendant counted through a woman hints at something unprecedented. Second, the pronoun is singular: "he shall bruise your head." Third, the victory is costly: the deliverer is himself struck. A wounded victor, born of a woman, crushing the serpent: the whole gospel in one dark verse.

Finally, note the small mercies that close the chapter. Adam names his wife Eve, "mother of all living," which Christian interpreters have long read as an act of faith in the promise just spoken. God clothes them in garments of skins, which implies that animal life was taken: Genesis does not narrate the killing, but the implication stands, and the typological force with it: the first bloodshed Scripture implies is provided by God, to cover human shame. And even the expulsion is mercy with a purpose, "lest he... eat of the tree of life and live

for ever" in a fallen state (Genesis 3:22); the way back to the tree of life is barred until it can be opened rightly, and Revelation 22 shows it open at last.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 3:15 is the taproot of messianic hope, and the New Testament harvests it deliberately. St. Paul tells the Romans, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20), reading the Church into the woman's seed. Revelation 12 stages the verse as a drama: a woman, her male child, and the dragon who is "that ancient serpent."

The Fathers, beginning in the second century, also noticed the reverse symmetry between Eve and Mary: a virgin, a message from an angelic being, and a choice. Eve believed the serpent and disobeyed; Mary believed Gabriel and said yes. The Church never defined every detail of this typology, but it is among the oldest and most universal readings in Christian literature, and it is why Christians came to call Mary the New Eve. Genesis 3:20 calls Eve "mother of all living"; John 19:26 to 27 will show Jesus, at the moment of the serpent's defeat, giving his mother to the beloved disciple, and Revelation 12:17 calls Christians "the rest of her offspring."

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.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 397. Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. All subsequent sin is disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

CCC 410 to 411. After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. Genesis 3:15 is the Protoevangelium, the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers. The Christian tradition sees in this passage the New Adam and, in the woman, Mary, the new Eve.

CCC 412. Why did God not prevent the first man from sinning? St. Leo the Great responds: Christ's grace gives us greater blessings than those the demon's envy had taken away. There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin: "O happy fault!"

CCC 2568. In the Old Testament, the revelation of prayer comes between the fall and the restoration of man, that is, between God's sorrowful call to his first children, "Where are you?", and the response of the Son on coming into the world.

THREAD WATCH

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

- Thread A, the widening family: the scope has not widened yet, but it has fractured. Keep the group feeling the wound; the widening covenants to come are God's staged repair of one broken family.
- Thread B, blood and oath: the garments of skins (Genesis 3:21) imply the first bloodshed in Scripture, provided by God to cover sinners (an inference the text invites rather than narrates; say so if asked). Do not press it hard tonight; let it register. It escalates at Noah's altar, Moriah, Sinai, and the cup.
- Thread C, the mountain: the expulsion moves the family eastward, away from the elevated garden. Every covenant to come will climb back up: Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Zion, Calvary.
- New thread planted tonight, the seed of the woman: singular, wounded, victorious. It surfaces again with Abraham's singular seed (Session 4 to 5, Galatians 3:16), David's son (Session 8), and the woman at the cross and in Revelation 12 (Sessions 10 and 12).
- The sealed guess from Take-Home 1 stays sealed. If anyone asks, smile and say we open them in Session 10.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants can name the serpent's three step strategy (misquote, contradict, slander the Father) and recognize it in modern dress.
2. Participants have discovered Revelation 12:9 and Romans 16:20 themselves, confirming that Scripture reads Genesis 3:15 messianically.
3. Participants can explain why "seed of the woman," the singular pronoun, and the bruised heel make Genesis 3:15 the first gospel.
4. Participants have met the Eve and Mary typology from the Fathers, presented with the Church's own confidence and restraint.
5. The group has seen that God's response to sin leads with promise (Genesis 3:15, spoken before any judgment falls on the humans) and closes in mercy (the garments of skins, Genesis 3:21).

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give the Genesis 3:15 close reading (Q4 to Q6) a full 25 minutes; it is the theological heart of the night. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Fold Q2 (the silent Adam) into leader commentary during Q1 rather than a standalone discussion.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the garments of skins for home reading.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, when we hid, you came looking. When we believed a lie about you, you answered with a promise. Give us tonight the honesty to see ourselves in Adam and Eve, and the hope to hear, inside the oldest curse, the first announcement of your Son. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

- W1.** What is the most persuasive lie you ever believed for a while, and what finally broke its spell?
- W2.** When something goes badly wrong because of you, what is your instinct: hide, explain, blame, or come clean? Where did we all learn those moves?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

- 1.** Read Genesis 3:1 to 5 aloud. Track the serpent's exact words against what God actually said in Genesis 2:16 to 17. What are his three moves, in order?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First, misquotation framed as a question: "Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree?" (God had said the opposite: eat freely of every tree but one.) Second, flat contradiction: "You will not die." Third, and deepest, slander against God's motive: "God knows that... you will be like God," as if the Father were a rival hoarding privilege. He converts the covenant into a rigged contract in Eve's imagination before she ever touches the fruit. CCC 397 puts it exactly: trust in the Creator died in the heart first.

- 2.** Genesis 3:6 contains four quiet words most readers miss: "her husband, who was with her." Given Adam's job description from last week (Genesis 2:15, to till and to keep, to guard), what should Adam have done, and what does his silence cost?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 3:6 places Adam "with her," and the serpent's "you" in 3:1 to 5 is plural in the Hebrew; the traditional reading, which this study follows, concludes that Adam was present for the temptation and stood silent. On that reading, the guardian priest failed his post: his vocation was to protect the sanctuary and his bride (the sanction of death was addressed to him before Eve existed), and his silence is the first failure of sacrificial headship. Be precise about what that phrase means, because Scripture defines it: headship in the Bible is measured by Ephesians 5:25, "husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," and by the Master who washed feet (John 13:14 to 15). It is the vocation to die first, not the right to be served first; it confers a cross, not a privilege. Hold the thought: the study is heading toward a Bridegroom who, faced with the same enemy, will lay down his life for his bride rather than stay silent.

3. Read Genesis 3:8 to 13. What is God's first recorded question to fallen humanity, and what does the tone of this scene tell us about how God pursues sinners?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Where are you?" God does not open with a verdict but with a summons to relationship, the question a father calls into the dark. The Catechism (2568) hears in this question the beginning of the whole drama of prayer. The interrogation that follows draws out confession (however blame shifting); God is treating them as covenant family to be recovered, not employees to be terminated.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

4. Now the center of the night. Read Genesis 3:14 to 15 slowly, twice. Three details hide in plain sight: whose "seed" is named, which pronoun does the decisive verb take, and what happens to the victor. Find all three.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The seed of the woman (Scripture normally counts descent through the man, so this is deliberately strange and points toward a son uniquely of a woman). The pronoun is grammatically singular: "he shall bruise your head." Hebrew "seed" can be collective, and a collective enmity does run through Scripture (see Q6), but the tradition, already signaled by the ancient Greek translation's striking masculine "he," hears in this singular pronoun one decisive descendant. And the victor is wounded: "you shall bruise his heel." A serpent crusher, born of a woman, who conquers by being struck. The Church calls this verse the Protoevangelium, the first gospel (CCC 410).

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

5. Does the rest of the Bible actually read it that way, or is that Catholic wishful thinking? Two tests. Somewhere in Revelation 12, the dragon is given his ancient alias; find it. And near the end of Romans 16, St. Paul makes a promise to the Church that echoes Genesis 3:15; find that too.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Revelation 12:9: "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan," in a chapter starring a woman, her male child, and war with the dragon. Romans 16:20: "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet," extending the seed's victory to Christ's body, the Church. Scripture itself confirms the messianic reading; the group has just watched the canon interpret the canon.

Build, Then Press | "It Is Just a Story About Snakes"

Here is the skeptical reading at full strength. Genesis 3:14 to 15 is an etiology, an ancient explanation of observable facts: snakes crawl, people hate snakes, snakes bite heels, people smash snake heads. "Seed" is a collective noun (it usually is), so the verse just predicts perpetual hostility between humans and serpents. Reading a Messiah into it, the objection goes, is theology imported centuries later.

6. Take the reading seriously and press the details it cannot digest. If this is only about literal snakes, why does the sentence address the serpent as a moral agent under judgment? Why is the seed counted through the woman, against the Bible's own convention? Why does the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) render the pronoun with a striking masculine "he" against ordinary grammar, why do the Aramaic Targums connect this verse to the days of the Messiah, and why do the New Testament's own canonical patterns (Romans 16:20, Revelation 12) treat the verse as a promise rather than a zoology lesson? And on the collective reading, what do you do with Revelation 12 and Romans 16:20?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The etiological reading explains the snake but not the sentence. Genesis itself treats the serpent as a personal tempter judged for deception, not a zoological specimen; the woman's seed breaks the ordinary genealogical pattern; and the canon's own last book identifies the serpent as Satan and stages the verse as cosmic war. A collective sense is real (enmity between the serpent's brood and the woman's children runs through Scripture, and Paul applies the victory to the whole Church), but the singular "he" who takes the wound and crushes the head is one man. The Church's reading is not imported; it is exported from the text by Scripture's own authors.

DIG DEEPER **The Garments of Skins**

Genesis 3:21: "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them." Skins imply an animal died; Genesis does not narrate the killing, but the implication is hard to avoid, and it makes this the Bible's first implied death and blood, provided by God himself to cover human shame. The fig leaves they sewed for themselves (3:7) were not enough. Read in the light of the whole canon (Hebrews 9:22), Christian typology has seen here the first hint that covering sin costs a life, and that God himself provides it. File this next to the ram at Moriah, the Passover lamb, and the words "this is my blood." The pattern is planted on the same page as the fall.

7. Read Genesis 3:20 to 24. After the sentence is spoken, find three mercies in the closing verses: one act of Adam's, one act of God's, and one purpose clause explaining the expulsion.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Adam names his wife Eve, "mother of all living," which interpreters have long read as an act of faith in the promise of 3:15 spoken moments earlier: he believes life will come through her. God clothes them (the garments of skins, see the Dig Deeper). And the expulsion itself carries a merciful purpose: "lest he... eat of the tree of life and live for ever" frozen in a fallen state. The gate is barred so it can one day be opened rightly; Revelation 22:2 and 22:14 show the tree of life again, with the redeemed given the right to it.

8. The Fathers noticed a symmetry: a virgin, a spirit messenger, a word to be believed or refused. Set Genesis 3:1 to 6 beside Luke 1:26 to 38. What reverses?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eve, approached by a fallen angel, doubted God's word and grasped; death followed. Mary, approached by a faithful angel, believed God's word and surrendered ("let it be to me according to your word"); Life himself followed. St. Justin and St. Irenaeus drew this out within a century of the apostles: the knot of Eve's disobedience untied by Mary's obedience. This is why the most ancient title for Mary is the New Eve, and why she will reappear at every hinge of this study.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. The serpent's core lie is that God is a rival, not a Father. Where does that lie currently have a foothold in your life, some area where you quietly suspect God's commands are keeping something good from you?

S2. God's first move toward the fallen was a question, "Where are you?", and his second was a promise. Who in your life needs you to imitate that pattern this week, pursuit before verdict?

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."

Closing Prayer

Father, we believed a slander against you, and you answered with a promise. Guard us from the ancient voice that calls your love a leash. Teach us the obedience of the New Eve and the courage of the New Adam, and when we fall, find us quickly, clothe us, and set our feet again toward the tree of life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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)

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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 3:1 to 5 with Genesis 2:16 to 17, the serpent's three moves
- Genesis 3:6, her husband who was with her
- Genesis 3:8 to 13, Where are you?
- Genesis 3:14 to 15, the Protoevangelium (close reading)
- Revelation 12:9, the ancient serpent identified (live discovery)
- Romans 16:20, Satan crushed under your feet (live discovery)
- Genesis 3:20 to 24, Eve, the garments of skins, the barred gate
- Luke 1:26 to 38, the Annunciation, the reversal

Supporting Passages

- Job 26:13 and Isaiah 27:1, serpent and dragon language for the enemy
- Genesis 2:15 with Numbers 3:7 to 8, Adam's guardianship (from Session 1)
- Revelation 12:17, the rest of her offspring
- John 19:26 to 27, the woman at the cross (do not preview; leader only)
- Revelation 22:2 and 22:14, the tree of life regained
- Galatians 3:16, the singular seed (arrives in Sessions 4 to 5; leader only)