

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that God redeems Israel as his firstborn son, that Passover is a *zikkaron*, a memorial in which every generation participates, and that the Sinai covenant is sealed with sprinkled blood, the words "behold the blood of the covenant," and a meal in God's presence on the mountain.

Catholic Touchstone. God formed Israel as his people, freeing them from slavery and sealing the covenant of Sinai, giving them his law by the hand of Moses, so that they would recognize and serve him as the one living and true God (CCC 62 to 63).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Four hundred years pass between Genesis and Exodus, and the family has become a people: the tribe of seventy that went down to Egypt (Exodus 1:5) is now a multitude, exactly as promised to Abraham, and enslaved, exactly as foretold in the dark of Genesis 15:13. When God commissions Moses at the burning bush, listen for two things. First, the covenant memory: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:6); the exodus is not a new project but an old oath being kept ("God remembered his covenant with Abraham," 2:24). Second, the family word: "Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, Let my son go that he may serve me; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son" (4:22 to 23). The exodus is a Father recovering a son, and the tenth plague is that sentence carried out.

The formula the group learned in Genesis 17 now expands to its full classic shape. Exodus 6:7: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." Both halves are present for the first time: possession and presence, "my people" and "your God." Make sure the group catches it themselves; they have been hunting this sentence for a session and this is the first payoff.

Passover (Exodus 12) deserves unhurried attention because its logic underwrites the entire sacramental economy. A lamb without blemish, kept by the household for four days; its blood on the doorposts as the marker of covenant protection; and, crucial and often missed, the lamb must be eaten: "they shall eat the flesh that night" (12:8). The blood alone was not the rite; the sacrifice was consumed, the family incorporated into the offering by eating it. And the whole thing is commanded forward: "this day shall be for you a memorial day" (12:14). The Hebrew is *zikkaron*, and a *zikkaron* is not nostalgia. Exodus 13:8 instructs every future father to say "it is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt," and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3 goes further: "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day," spoken to a generation mostly born after Sinai. In Israel's liturgy, the covenant events are not merely recalled; each generation is made present to them and participates in them. The Catechism states this Old Testament principle explicitly (CCC 1363).

At Sinai, the third promise upgrade of the study occurs (though the group charts this later): the tribe becomes a nation. God proposes before he gives the Sinai law: "if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5 to 6). Note the vocation buried in that title: a kingdom of priests exists for the sake of "all peoples"; Israel is elected not instead of the nations but for them, as the trustee of Abraham's third promise.

Exodus 24 is the covenant ratification, and it is the single most important liturgical scene in the Old Testament for this study. Walk its sequence: the words of the LORD are read aloud and the people vow obedience (24:3, 7); young men offer sacrifices; Moses throws half the blood against the altar (Godward) and half upon the people (24:6, 8), binding both parties in one blood, and says the sentence to remember above all others tonight: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (24:8). And then, verses 9 to 11, the scene almost too astonishing to be believed: Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders go up the mountain, "they saw the God of Israel," and under his feet a pavement like sapphire, "and he did not lay his hand on the chief men... they beheld God, and ate and drank." The covenant concludes not with a signature but with a meal in the presence of God. Word, vow, blood, meal: fix that four beat sequence in the group's memory and say nothing more about it. It is the most heavily loaded gun in the entire study.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Everything in this session is root; the study's later sessions are the fulfillment, and the leader must resist harvesting early. But know the map privately. The unblemished lamb whose bones must not be broken (Exodus 12:5, 46) is taken up across the New Testament: John 19:36 cites the unbroken-bone rubric as fulfilled at the cross; 1 Peter 1:19 evokes the lamb without blemish or spot; and 1 Corinthians 5:7 names him outright: "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed." The sentence of Exodus 24:8 is repeated, almost word for word, at a supper in an upper room, and Session 10 is built so that participants discover the echo with their own eyes; if you quote Matthew 26:28 tonight you will spend the study's single largest payoff for nothing. The meal of the elders on Sinai, beholding God and eating, is the Old Testament's deepest anticipation of Eucharistic communion, and Session 11 returns to it. Plant deep, harvest later.

One connection may be made openly because the New Testament makes it pastorally rather than climactically: 1 Peter 2:9 applies Exodus 19:6 to the baptized, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." The vocation of Sinai, priesthood for the sake of the nations, did not expire; it widened. Participants may discover this tonight without any spoiler cost.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Melito of Sardis *On the Passover (c. AD 170)*

In one of the earliest Christian sermons we possess, St. Melito preached the Passover as a mystery both old and new: old according to the law, new according to the Word; the model was in the law, the reality in the Gospel. For Melito the lamb of Egypt was precious precisely because of what it prefigured, the way a sketch is honored for the sake of the finished portrait.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nyssa *The Life of Moses*

St. Gregory of Nyssa read the exodus as the map of every soul's journey: the slavery, the blood marked door, the sea, the wilderness, and the mountain are stages of the life of grace, and Moses' ascent into the dark cloud teaches that the closer one draws to God, the more one leaves behind the need to see in order to trust.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies (on the typology of the lamb)*

St. John Chrysostom asked his congregation why the blood of an irrational lamb could turn away the destroyer

in Egypt, and answered: not because of what it was, but because of what it signified. The power was on loan from the sacrifice it prefigured. Even in Egypt, Chrysostom taught, the blood on the doorposts saved by pointing forward.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 62 to 63. God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God. Israel is the priestly people of God, called by the name of the LORD, the people of "the elder brethren" in the faith of Abraham.

CCC 709. The Law, the sign of God's promise and covenant, ought to have governed the hearts and institutions of the people descended from Abraham's faith; if Israel lives as God's firstborn son, it becomes the herald of the kingdom for the nations.

CCC 1150. Among the signs of the Old Covenant marking the liturgical life of the People of God are circumcision, the anointing and consecration of kings and priests, sacrifices, and above all the Passover. The Church sees in these signs a prefiguring of the sacraments of the New Covenant.

CCC 1363. In the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them.

THREAD WATCH

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

- The covenant formula reaches full form tonight: Exodus 6:7, "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." This is the group's first hunt payoff; let them find it and celebrate the find.
- Thread A, the widening family: nation. Exodus 19:5 to 6 makes it official, and 4:22 makes the family grammar explicit: Israel is God's firstborn son. The chart moment is Session 8; keep holding.
- Thread B, blood and oath: tonight the thread speaks its own name, "behold the blood of the covenant" (24:8), half on the altar, half on the people, both parties bound in one blood. DO NOT quote or allude to Matthew 26:28. Session 10's entire architecture depends on the group hearing the echo fresh. Guard this above everything.
- Thread C, the mountain: Sinai, the study's fourth summit, and for the first time the mountain hosts a covenant meal: they beheld God, and ate and drank (24:11). Word, vow, blood, meal. Plant the sequence; say nothing about where it recurs.
- The lamb thread from Moriah ("God will provide himself the lamb") quietly gains mass tonight: unblemished, kept in the house, blood applied, flesh eaten, bones unbroken. Do not connect it aloud; the accumulating images are doing their own work.
- Sealed guesses remain sealed. Two sessions to go.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have found the full covenant formula in Exodus 6:7 themselves, their first payoff in the formula hunt.

2. Participants can explain Israel as God's firstborn son and the exodus as a Father recovering his child under the old oath to Abraham.
3. Participants can articulate what a *zikkaron* is from Exodus 12:14, 13:8, and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3: participation, not nostalgia.
4. Participants have walked the four beat sequence of Exodus 24, word, vow, blood, meal, and can repeat "behold the blood of the covenant" from memory.
5. Participants have seen that the lamb was eaten, not only slain, and that priesthood at Sinai exists for the sake of all peoples.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give Passover 20 minutes, the memorial steelman 15, and protect the final 20 for Exodus 24; the meal on the mountain should be the last and slowest thing the group sees. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q1 (the burning bush covenant memory) into leader framing while introducing the session.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the unbroken bones for home reading.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, you heard your people groan in Egypt and you remembered your covenant, because you never forget it. You brought out your firstborn with a strong hand, marked his doors in blood, and fed him at your table on the mountain. Remember us tonight; mark us, feed us, and teach us what your blood covenant means. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Is there a meal your family eats, or a ritual you repeat, that carries your family's story in it? What happens inside you when you keep it, and what would be lost if you stopped?

W2. What is the difference between remembering an event and reliving one? Have you ever kept an anniversary that felt less like recall and more like return?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Exodus 2:23 to 25 and 3:6. Israel has been enslaved for centuries and God seems silent. When God finally moves, what reason does the text give, and how does God introduce himself to Moses? What does that tell us about what the exodus actually is?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob," and at the bush he names himself by the same three names. The exodus is not a rescue improvised out of pity; it is an oath being kept, the Genesis 15 covenant coming due (God had even told Abraham about the four hundred years, 15:13). When God seems silent, the covenant is still ticking.

2. Read Exodus 4:22 to 23. What family word does God use for the entire nation of Israel, and how does that one word explain both the exodus and, soberly, the tenth plague?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Israel is my first-born son." The exodus is a Father recovering a kidnapped son from a king who enslaved him, and the demand carries its own justice: let my son go, or your firstborn is forfeit. The tenth plague is that sentence executed on a Pharaoh warned from the start. The covenant family grammar we have traced since Eden, son, household, tribe, has now been said of a whole people by God himself.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

3. You know the sentence you are hunting. Somewhere in Exodus 6:2 to 8, it appears in its fullest form yet, both halves at last. Find it and read it aloud.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 6:7: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." Possession and presence, both halves together for the first time: my people, your God. Congratulate the group; the hunt is on for the rest of Scripture, and this sentence has a long road ahead of it. Note also verse 8: the whole speech is anchored in the oath, "the land which I swore to give to Abraham."

4. Now Passover. Read Exodus 12:3 to 14 and gather the requirements as a list: what kind of lamb, what happens to it before the night, what is done with the blood, and, verse 8, what must be done with the lamb itself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A lamb without blemish; chosen for the household on the tenth day and kept until the fourteenth (12:3, 6), four days in the family's keeping; its blood put on the doorposts and lintel as the sign under which the destroyer passes over; and then the requirement most people forget: "they shall eat the flesh that night." The blood alone did not complete the rite. The sacrifice had to be consumed; the family was saved by the blood and joined to the offering by the meal. Sacrifice, in God's economy, ends in communion. Hold that principle; it never stops being true in this study.

Build, Then Press | "A Memorial Is Just a Reminder"

Here is the position at full strength, and it sounds like common sense. Exodus 12:14 calls Passover "a memorial day," and a memorial, in plain English, is a reminder: a monument, a moment of silence, a photo on the mantel. The event happened once, back there; later generations can be grateful for it, learn from it, and commemorate it, but they cannot be part of it, because time only runs one way. On this reading, every Passover after the first is a history lesson with lamb, and any talk of later generations "participating" in the exodus is pious exaggeration.

5. Reasonable, so test it against how Israel itself talks. Read Exodus 13:8: when a son asks his father about the feast, what pronouns is the father commanded to use, "them" and "they," or something else? Then read Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3, Moses speaking forty years later to a generation mostly born in the wilderness: with whom does Moses insist the covenant was made?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Exodus 13:8: "because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt," commanded speech for fathers who were never in Egypt. Deuteronomy 5:3: "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day," said to people who were not at Sinai. Israel's own liturgy refuses the "just a reminder" reading: the Hebrew *zikkaron* is a memorial that makes the saving event present so that each generation stands inside it. The Catechism states the principle straight from the Old Testament: in the liturgical celebration of these events, "they become in a certain way present and real" (CCC 1363). The steelman's common sense is modern sense; biblical memorial is thicker. File the principle carefully, because everything later in this study that stands on the word "remembrance" stands on it.

6. Read Exodus 19:3 to 6, God's proposal at Sinai. What does God ask before any of Sinai's laws are given, what does he call Israel, and, look closely at verse 5, for whose sake does the wording suggest Israel holds this office?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God proposes, "if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant," and the people will answer yes (19:8); covenant is entered, not imposed. Israel is to be "my own possession among all peoples... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." And the frame is universal: "for all the earth is mine." A priest, by definition, serves on behalf of others; a whole kingdom of priests exists on behalf of the other nations. Israel is elected for the world, not instead of it, which is exactly the shape of Abraham's third promise: in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

7. Did that priestly vocation expire with the Old Covenant? Somewhere in 1 Peter 2, the apostle quotes Sinai's job description and hands it to someone. Find the verse. Who holds the office now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

1 Peter 2:9: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," Exodus 19:6 applied to the baptized, with the same outward facing purpose: "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you." The vocation did not expire; it widened. Every baptized person in the room is inside Sinai's job description tonight.

DIG DEEPER Not a Bone Broken

Two small rubrics in Exodus 12 seem oddly specific: the lamb must be "without blemish" (12:5), and "you shall not break a bone of it" (12:46). Scripture does not waste rubrics. A perfect lamb, kept in the house, slain at twilight, eaten by the family, with not one bone broken: the Old Testament preserves these details like evidence in a sealed envelope. Keep them sealed for now, and when the study reaches its climax, open the envelope and see who the details always described.

8. Now the summit. Read Exodus 24:3 to 8 and reconstruct the ratification step by step: what is read, what do the people say, and what exactly does Moses do with the two halves of the blood? Say his sentence in verse 8 out loud, together, and remember it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The words of the LORD are read; the people vow, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do"; Moses throws half the blood against the altar, Godward, and half upon the people, binding both parties of the covenant in one blood, one shared life, one family. And the sentence: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you." Have the group say it aloud together and tell them plainly: memorize that sentence. Do not tell them why.

9. Read Exodus 24:9 to 11 slowly. Who goes up, what do they see, and what is the last thing the text says they did? Given everything this study has taught about how covenants conclude, why does this scene end the way it does?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascend; "they saw the God of Israel," a sapphire pavement under his feet; and "he did not lay his hand" on them, no one dies. The last line: "they beheld God, and ate and drank." The covenant concludes with a meal in the presence of God, because covenants make family, and family

eats together. Word, vow, blood, meal: that is covenant ratification in its fullest Old Testament form, and Israel experienced it once, on a mountain, and never forgot it. Close the night on that image: seventy elders, a sapphire floor, and supper with God.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Sinai's office, a royal priesthood for the sake of the world, now belongs to the baptized (1 Peter 2:9). Who are the "nations" in your daily orbit, the people you are positioned to stand before God for, and what would praying for them by name this week look like?

S2. Israel's memorial made the next generation say "what the LORD did for me." When you attend Mass or keep your family's faith rituals, are you attending a reminder or entering a reality? What would change if you walked in expecting participation?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this Sunday, listen for the words spoken over the chalice and simply notice what you notice. Write down one phrase afterward. Bring it next month; do not research it yet.
- Pick three people who do not know God and pray for them by name each day this week, deliberately, as a priest of 1 Peter 2:9 standing before God on their behalf.
- Before next session, read Exodus 32:1 to 29 and Deuteronomy 30:1 to 6. Watch what the people do at the foot of the mountain, and watch what God promises to do to the heart.

Closing Prayer

Father, you bound yourself to a people with words and vows, with blood on the altar and blood sprinkled upon the people, and then you set a table on the mountain and let them eat in your sight and live. We were made for that table. Keep the memory of your covenant burning in us, make our homes like the blood marked houses of Egypt, and bring us up the mountain at last. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Exodus 24:8 (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)

- Exodus 2:23 to 25 and 3:6, God remembered his covenant; the God of the fathers
- Exodus 4:22 to 23, Israel my firstborn son
- Exodus 6:2 to 8, the full covenant formula (live discovery, verse 7)
- Exodus 12:3 to 14, the Passover lamb: unblemished, housed, blood applied, flesh eaten
- Exodus 13:8 and Deuteronomy 5:2 to 3, the memorial steelman texts
- Exodus 19:3 to 8, kingdom of priests and holy nation
- 1 Peter 2:9, the royal priesthood widened (live discovery)
- Exodus 24:3 to 8, word, vow, blood: behold the blood of the covenant
- Exodus 24:9 to 11, they beheld God, and ate and drank

Supporting Passages

- Genesis 15:13, the four hundred years foretold
- Exodus 12:5 and 12:46, without blemish; not a bone broken (Dig Deeper; keep sealed)
- Exodus 12:26 to 27 and 13:14, when your children ask
- CCC 1363, the memorial principle in Israel's own liturgy
- John 19:36, 1 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19, Matthew 26:28: leader only, DO NOT preview; Session 10 depends on it