

SESSION 11

The Family of God

Pentecost, the Church, and the Covenant Family Living Now

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Pentecost reverses Babel and launches the worldwide covenant family, that baptism and the Eucharist are the new covenant's entrance and renewal (harvesting Sessions 3, 5, and 6), and that the Church is the restored kingdom of David thrown open to the nations, God's visible covenant family in history, where "I will be your God" is lived now.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church is the goal of all things: God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the convocation of men in Christ, and this convocation is the Church (CCC 760). The Eucharist makes the Church (CCC 1396).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Acts 2 is Genesis 11 run in reverse, and the group should be allowed to discover the symmetry. At Babel, one proud people grasping at heaven had its language shattered and was scattered into the nations; at Pentecost, the Spirit descends in wind and fire on a gathered people at prayer, and the language barrier breaks in the opposite direction: "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6), and Luke lists the nations, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and onward, a deliberate table of nations moment. The scattering of Genesis 11 begins its great reversal, and the timing is liturgically loaded: Pentecost was Israel's feast fifty days after Passover, a feast Jewish tradition came to associate with the giving of the covenant at Sinai, an association explicit in later rabbinic sources and anticipated in Second Temple celebrations of the feast as a covenant renewal day (Jubilees; Qumran). At the first Sinai, the law was written on stone and three thousand fell in the aftermath of the calf (Exodus 32:28); at this Sinai, the Spirit writes on hearts, exactly as Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 promised, and "there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Three thousand lost at the covenant's breaking; three thousand gained at its renewal. Luke is not subtle, and the group, primed by ten weeks, will catch it.

Peter's Pentecost sermon is a covenant history lecture: David's tomb, David's throne, God's oath "to set one of his descendants upon his throne" (Acts 2:30, citing Psalm 132:11, the very verse the group used in Session 8 to prove the covenant was sworn), fulfilled in the risen Jesus, "both Lord and Christ." And when the crowd is cut to the heart and asks what to do, Peter's answer is covenant entrance: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you AND TO YOUR CHILDREN and to all that are far off" (2:38 to 39). Hear the harvests: forgiveness of sins is Jeremiah's fourth term; the gift of the Spirit is Ezekiel 36:27; "to your children" echoes the eighth day logic of Genesis 17, the covenant claiming infants before merit, the logic the Church hears behind infant baptism (CCC 1250 to 1252); and "all that are far off" is the third promise reaching for the nations. Baptism is circumcision's fulfillment as covenant entrance (Colossians 2:11 to 12, planted in Session 5), the flood's antitype (1 Peter 3:21, discovered in Session 3), and Ezekiel's sprinkled clean water, all at once.

And what does the newborn covenant family do? Acts 2:42 gives the four marks in one verse: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Teaching, communion, Eucharist, liturgy: the anatomy of covenant life. "The breaking of bread" is Luke's established term for the Eucharistic meal (Luke 24:30 to 35, where the risen Lord is "known to them in the breaking of the bread"), and 1 Corinthians makes its covenant mechanics explicit: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not

a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (10:16 to 17). The Eucharist is the covenant meal that continually makes the covenant family one, the *zikkaron* of the new Passover, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:26). Session 6 taught that sacrifice ends in communion and covenants conclude with a meal; the Church is the people who never stopped eating that meal.

One discovery must anchor the session's ecclesiology: Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem, where the Church's leaders rule on whether Gentiles enter the covenant family without circumcision. James settles it by quoting Amos 9:11 to 12: "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name" (Acts 15:16 to 17). Read what James has done: the fallen tent of David, the wrecked monarchy the group mourned in Session 8, has been rebuilt, and its rebuilding is identified with the Gentiles streaming into the Church. The Church is not a replacement for the Davidic kingdom, still less a detour from it; the Church IS the Davidic kingdom restored, fulfilled, and universalized in Christ, already present in mystery as the kingdom's seed and beginning on earth and awaiting its consummation (CCC 763, 669), exactly as Psalm 72 prayed: may all nations be blessed in him. The kingdom question of Acts 1:6, "will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?", is answered by the whole book: yes, and bigger than you asked.

Be honest about what the group can see with their own eyes: this covenant family is visible. It has entrance rites (baptism), a family meal (the Eucharist), officers (apostles, and the elders they appoint, Acts 14:23), a council that issues binding decisions ("it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," 15:28), discipline (Matthew 18:17, "tell it to the church"), and rolls that grow by countable thousands. Every covenant in this study had visible signs and a visible people, because covenants create families and families are visible. The steelman tonight takes the strongest opposing instinct, the invisible church of all true believers, with full seriousness and full fairness.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Everything here is harvest, and the leader's map is short: the ark (Session 3) becomes the Church that carries the family through the waters (CCC 845); Sinai's "kingdom of priests" (Session 6) is already on the group's shoulders via 1 Peter 2:9, found live that night; the interim Levitical priesthood (Session 7) yields to the priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7), whose bread and wine offering the group met in Session 4's Dig Deeper and whose unique priesthood the Church's ordained priesthood participates in and makes sacramentally present (CCC 1545); the personalized formula on the Davidic king (Session 8) now covers everyone incorporated into the king by baptism, "sons in the Son"; and Hosea's reversal (Session 9) is quoted over the Church's Gentile members: "once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10), tonight's memory verse.

What remains unharvested after tonight: the formula's final utterance, the wedding, the queen mother, and the tree of life. One session. The leader should end the night pointing forward: the covenant family is on the road, the meal is viaticum, food for the journey, and the study's last session asks where the road goes.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians* (c. AD 96)

Writing from Rome to a quarreling Corinth while the apostle John likely still lived, St. Clement appealed to visible, transmitted order: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ, and the apostles appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons, providing for succession after them. For Clement the covenant family had

structure from the beginning, not as bureaucracy but as inheritance: the household of God has stewards because it is a household.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan *Commentary on Psalm 40*

St. Ambrose, the bishop who baptized Augustine, compressed his ecclesiology into a single famous sentence: where Peter is, there is the Church; and where the Church is, there is no death but life eternal. The visible communion gathered around the apostolic office was not, for Ambrose, a human arrangement layered over the gospel; it was where the covenant life was found and fed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1845)*

St. John Henry Newman, studying the Fathers as an Anglican in search of the true Church, concluded famously that to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant: the Christianity of the second, third, and fourth centuries, visible, sacramental, hierarchical, Eucharistic, was recognizably the Catholic Church, and the covenant family of Acts is its infancy, not a different organism. History, Newman found, is the Catholic argument.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 751 to 752. The word Church means convocation or assembly: the assembly of those whom God's Word calls together to form the People of God who, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ. In Christian usage the word designates the liturgical assembly, the local community, and the whole universal community of believers: the three are inseparable.

CCC 766. The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self giving, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. As Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross: from his side flowed blood and water, the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.

CCC 1267. Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ and incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal fonts is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes.

CCC 1396. The unity of the Mystical Body: the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ; through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body, the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism.

THREAD WATCH

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

- Tonight harvests the ecclesial threads: the ark, the royal priesthood, baptism (flood, circumcision, Ezekiel's water), the zikkaron meal, the rebuilt tent of David. Name each backward connection as the group finds it; they earned every one.
- The Babel reversal and the two Sinais (three thousand lost, three thousand added) are the session's two discovery jewels: let the group compute both.

- The formula tonight: lived, not spoken. God dwells in the family by the Spirit; the sentence itself is being saved. Its final utterance is one session away (Revelation 21:3); guard it absolutely: no Revelation quotations tonight.
- The gebirah (Session 8) stays parked one more week. If anyone asks about Mary tonight, smile: next session, and it is worth the wait.
- Thread C, the mountain: touched lightly tonight via Hebrews 12:22 held in reserve; the final summit belongs to Session 12. Zion language in Acts 2 (the upper room in Jerusalem) may be noted in passing.
- Melchizedek and Psalm 110:4 may surface if the group connects the priest for ever to the Church's priesthood; welcome it briefly (Hebrews 7) without derailing into a full priesthood study. That is another study (and the leader may commend one).

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants have discovered the Babel reversal and the two Sinais symmetry (three thousand and three thousand) themselves.
2. Participants can name Peter's Pentecost offer as covenant entrance, and connect its clauses to Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, Genesis 17, and the third promise.
3. Participants have found Acts 2:42's four marks and can explain the Eucharist as the covenant family's zikkaron meal that makes the many one body.
4. Participants have discovered the rebuilt tent of David in Acts 15 and can state the claim precisely: the Church is the Davidic kingdom restored and opened to the nations.
5. Participants have engaged the invisible church steelman at full strength and can answer it from the covenant pattern itself.
6. Participants understand their own baptism and Communion as covenant events: entrance and renewal in the family of God.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: Pentecost and its symmetries, 18; baptism as covenant entrance, 10; the meal and the four marks, 10; the rebuilt tent of David, 8; steelman, 9. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q6 (the four marks) into leader teaching if the Pentecost discoveries run long; never cut the Acts 15 discovery or the steelman.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on the keys for home reading.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, fifty days after the Lamb was slain, you set fire on the heads of the praying and gave the nations back their one voice. What Babel scattered, Pentecost gathers; what Sinai wrote on stone, your Spirit writes on us. Gather us tonight into the family you have been building since the garden, and teach us to live as people who bear your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. When did a group of strangers first feel like family to you, a team, a parish, a unit, a friend group? What actually converted strangers into kin?

W2. What is the difference between believing the same things as other people and belonging to the same body as them? Can you have one without the other?

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

1. Read Acts 2:1 to 11, and then flip back to Genesis 11:1 to 9. Set the two scenes side by side: what happens to language in each, in which direction do people move, and what is heaven's posture in each? What is Luke showing us?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Babel: one language shattered into many, a people scattered outward, heaven descending in judgment on human self exaltation. Pentecost: many languages made mutually heard ("each one heard them speaking in his own language"), the nations gathered inward (Luke's list is a deliberate table of nations), heaven descending in gift, wind and fire on a people at prayer. Pentecost is Babel reversed: the scattering of Genesis 11, which the call of Abram in Genesis 12 was launched to heal, begins its healing here. The third promise has left the ground.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

2. Second symmetry, and it takes two texts. Pentecost was Israel's feast fifty days after Passover, linked in Jewish tradition with the giving of the covenant at Sinai. Read Exodus 32:28, the aftermath of the golden calf, and then Acts 2:41. Find the number in each verse. What has Luke done?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At the first Sinai, after the calf, "there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." At the new Sinai, "there were added that day about three thousand souls." Three thousand lost at the covenant's breaking; three thousand gained at its renewal, on the covenant's own anniversary. The law written on stone brought death to the lawless; the Spirit writing on hearts brings the dead to life, exactly the contrast Paul draws (2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"). Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 are not being quoted at Pentecost; they are being performed.

3. Read Peter's sermon climax, Acts 2:29 to 36, with your Session 8 notes in reach. Which covenant is Peter preaching, which sworn oath does he cite (check verse 30 against Psalm 132:11), and what is his verdict about where the son of David is right now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Davidic covenant, argued like a lawyer: David died and his tomb "is with us to this day," but God "had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne," Psalm 132:11, the exact verse the group used to prove the covenant was sworn. Peter's verdict: the oath is kept in the resurrection and ascension; Jesus is enthroned at God's right hand, "both Lord and Christ." The throne of David turned out to be higher than Jerusalem. The steelman of Session 8 receives its final answer from the first Christian sermon ever preached.

4. The crowd, cut to the heart, asks "what shall we do?" Read Acts 2:38 to 39 slowly and take Peter's answer apart clause by clause with your whole study in hand: baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, "to you and to your children," and "to all that are far off." Where has each clause been planted in the last ten weeks?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Forgiveness of sins: Jeremiah's fourth term ("I will remember their sin no more"), now offered at a font. The gift of the Spirit: Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put my spirit within you." "To you and to your children": an echo of the eighth day logic of Genesis 17, where the covenant claimed infants before merit, a logic the Church has always heard in Peter's words and lives out in baptizing the children of believers (CCC 1250 to 1252). "To all that are far off": the third promise, all the families of the earth, already reaching past the crowd. Baptism is the new covenant's entrance: the flood's antitype (1 Peter 3:21, Session 3), circumcision made without hands (Colossians 2:11 to 12, Session 5), and Ezekiel's clean water (Session 9), in one sacrament. Nobody talks their way into a family; you are born or adopted into one, and the font is where the adoption is executed.

5. Read Acts 2:42, one verse, and list the four things the newborn covenant family devoted itself to. Then read Luke 24:30 to 35: what is "the breaking of bread" in Luke's vocabulary? And 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 17: what does the meal actually do to the many who share it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The apostles' teaching, the fellowship (*koinonia*), the breaking of bread, and the prayers: doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, the four marks of covenant life in one verse, recognizable in any Catholic parish tonight. The breaking of bread is Luke's name for the Eucharistic meal; at Emmaus the risen Lord "was known to them in the breaking of the bread." And Paul gives the mechanics: the cup a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ, the bread in his body, "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." Session 6 taught that sacrifice ends in communion and covenants conclude with a meal. The Church is the people who never stopped eating the covenant meal, and the meal is what keeps making them one family, generation after generation: the Eucharist makes the Church (CCC 1396).

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Now a discovery that answers Session 8's deepest ache. The apostles once asked the risen Lord, "will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Years later, at the Church's first council, the leaders must

decide whether Gentiles enter the family without circumcision, and James settles it with a prophet. Read Acts 15:13 to 19, and identify: what fallen structure does the quoted prophecy say God is rebuilding, and what is the rebuilt structure for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Amos 9:11 to 12: "I will rebuild the dwelling (the fallen tent) of David, which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name." James's ruling: the influx of Gentiles into the Church IS the rebuilding of David's fallen house. The Church is not a replacement for the Davidic kingdom or a detour around it; the Church is the Davidic kingdom restored, enthroned in the risen Son of David, and thrown open to the nations, the kingdom already present in mystery, its seed and beginning on earth, awaiting its consummation (CCC 763, 669), exactly as Psalm 72 prayed: "may men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed" (72:17) and exactly as the chart's last row requires: kingdom widened to world. The question of Acts 1:6 was answered yes, and bigger than the askers dreamed.

Build, Then Press | "The True Church Is Invisible"

Give this its full strength, because it is the instinct of millions of sincere Christians and it guards something true. On this view, the real Church is the invisible communion of all who truly believe, known to God alone; visible institutions, buildings, hierarchies, membership rolls, are human scaffolding, helpful at best, corrupt at worst, and never to be confused with the Body of Christ itself. Its proof texts are real: "the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed" (Luke 17:20); "God knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19); and the parable of the weeds warns that the visible field contains both wheat and tares until the harvest. Its motive is reverent: no institution can bind or box the grace of God.

7. Honor what it guards: the Church's membership is finally known to God, and visible belonging without living faith saves no one; Catholic teaching says both plainly. Now press the covenant pattern of the entire study. Name one covenant we have met, Adam to David to the Upper Room, that had no visible sign, no visible people. Then look at the family in Acts with your own eyes: how does one enter it (2:38, 41), what does it do together (2:42), who leads it and how are they appointed (14:23), how does it settle a binding dispute (15:28), what does Jesus himself say to do with an unrepentant brother (Matthew 18:17), and can you obey that last command if the church is invisible?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every covenant in this study came with visible signs (Sabbath, rainbow, circumcision, Passover blood, a throne, a chalice) and a visible people, and again and again the covenant sealed itself in a meal (Exodus 24:11, Passover, the Upper Room), because covenants create families and families are findable: you can knock on their door and eat at their table. The family in Acts is entered by a public washing, countable by thousands, ordered by appointed elders, ruled by a council that speaks bindingly ("it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"), and disciplined by a command, "tell it to the church," that is literally unbeyable if the church cannot be located. The resolution honors both truths, as the Catholic teaching does: the Church is one reality with a visible and an invisible dimension, a society structured with hierarchical organs AND the mystical body of Christ, not two churches but one, as a sacrament is one reality of sign and grace (Lumen Gentium 8; CCC 771, 779). The steelman is right that the visible membership includes tares and that God alone reads hearts; it errs in cutting the soul loose from the body. The new covenant did not become less incarnate than the old ones. It became more: the family of the God who took flesh has a table you can find, water you can feel, and shepherds you can name, and its rolls opened at three thousand.

DIG DEEPER The Keys of the House of David

One Davidic office quietly crossed into the Church alongside the kingdom. In Isaiah 22:20 to 22, the king's chief steward, master of the palace, is given "the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open": an office of stewardship over the kingdom, second to the king, and succession built in (Eliakim replaces Shebna). When Jesus, the Son of David, says to Simon, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19), Catholic interpreters, and many others, have long heard Isaiah 22 behind the words: he is installing a steward over his restored royal house. A kingdom that has been rebuilt (Acts 15) comes with its furniture. This study can only wave at the office; a full study of Peter and his successors is its own journey, and a worthy next one.

8. Close the loop on the formula. In this study's language, what is the Church, in one sentence built from the chart? And where, concretely, in your ordinary week, is "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" actually being lived by this family?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group compose it; a worthy version: the Church is the covenant family of God in its worldwide form, the sixth row of the chart, entered through water, fed at the table of the new covenant, ordered as the rebuilt kingdom of David, and sent to the remaining families of the earth. And the formula is lived every time the family gathers: at every font ("I baptize you in the name..."), every absolution ("I absolve you..."), every Mass ("this is my body... the new covenant in my blood"), God is keeping the sentence in the present tense. The formula has one more thing to do in this study: to be spoken, once, finally, in a voice from a throne. Next week we go to the wedding. Bring nothing but yourselves.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. Peter's offer stands in the present tense, and its clause "to your children" runs through your house. Who in your family, children, godchildren, siblings, parents, is outside or drifting from the covenant family, and what is one concrete act of witness or invitation you can make this week?

S2. The first family devoted itself to four things: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, the prayers. Audit your own week honestly against the four. Which mark is thinnest in your life, and what is one specific step to thicken it before we meet again?

Live It This Week

- Find your baptism date if you have not already (Session 3's homework), and this week thank God for it explicitly: it was the day the covenant claimed you by name.
- At Mass this week, receive Communion (properly disposed) with 1 Corinthians 10:17 in mind: "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body." Look at the people in the Communion line with you and call them, silently, what the covenant calls them: family.
- Before the final session, read Revelation 19:6 to 9, Revelation 21:1 to 7, and Revelation 22:1 to 5. Bring your Bible, your chart notes, and your Take-Home 1. Everything ends where it began.

Closing Prayer

Father, you have made of all nations one family in your Son: washed at one font, fed at one table, gathered around the shepherds you appointed, and sent to the families of the earth still waiting. Deepen our devotion to the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers, and keep us faithful on the road, until the family reaches the feast. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

1 Peter 2:10 (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)

- Acts 2:1 to 11 with Genesis 11:1 to 9, Pentecost reverses Babel (live discovery)
- Exodus 32:28 with Acts 2:41, three thousand and three thousand, the two Sinais (live discovery)
- Acts 2:29 to 36 with Psalm 132:11, Peter preaches the sworn Davidic oath kept
- Acts 2:38 to 39, covenant entrance: the four clauses and their roots
- Acts 2:42 with Luke 24:30 to 35 and 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 17, the four marks; the meal makes the many one
- Acts 1:6 and Acts 15:13 to 19 with Amos 9:11 to 12, the tent of David rebuilt for the Gentiles (live discovery)
- Luke 17:20, 2 Timothy 2:19, Matthew 13:24 to 30, the invisible church steelman texts
- Acts 14:23, Acts 15:28, Matthew 18:17, the visibility texts (steelman press)

Supporting Passages

- 2 Corinthians 3:3 to 6, tablets of stone and tablets of hearts; the letter and the Spirit
- Colossians 2:11 to 12 and 1 Peter 3:21, baptism harvests (Sessions 5 and 3)
- 1 Corinthians 11:26, until he comes (the road points forward)
- Isaiah 22:20 to 22 with Matthew 16:19, the steward's keys (Dig Deeper; another study beckons)
- CCC 771 and Lumen Gentium 8, one Church, visible and invisible dimensions (steelman resolution)
- Hebrews 12:22 to 24 and all of Revelation: EMBARGOED until Session 12