

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 9. Behold the Blood of the Covenant

Reading: Exodus 20:22-24:18

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how covenant commands order communal life and how sacrifice, blood, assent, and a sacred meal ratify Israel's bond with God.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches the Old Law as preparation for the Gospel, covenant obedience, sacrificial worship, and the blood of the new covenant made present in the Eucharist.

Israel has already been rescued, brought to God, and given the Decalogue. Now the covenant takes social and liturgical form. The commands show that belonging to the Lord reaches into worship, work, property, violence, truthfulness, treatment of the vulnerable, and public justice. Exodus 24 then gathers words, sacrifice, blood, assent, mediation, and a sacred meal into a covenant-ratification ceremony. Let the group notice that order before tracing how the New Testament receives it.

What You Need to Know

Commands for a redeemed people

These commands do not earn Israel's rescue from Egypt. Rescue has already occurred. They order the life of a people who now belong to the Lord. Exodus 24:7 calls this body of instruction the book of the covenant. The placement matters: grace precedes Israel's covenant obedience.

Moral, liturgical, and juridical precepts

The Catechism recognizes moral, ceremonial, and judicial (the division is St. Thomas Aquinas at Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 99, not a formula of the Catechism) elements in the Old Law. These chapters move among all three. Some commands express enduring moral truth, while other provisions govern Israel in a particular historical stage of salvation. The Old Law is holy and good, but it is not the final form of God's revealed law. It prepares for the Gospel and requires interpretation in the light of Christ.

Do not evade the servant laws

Exodus 21 uses the language of slavery and contains provisions that will rightly trouble modern readers. Do not soften the vocabulary or claim that every arrangement described is morally ideal. First observe the limits the text imposes: a Hebrew male slave is released in the seventh year, while Exodus 21:7-11 treats a female slave differently and more harshly, kidnapping a person is punishable by death, serious injury can result in freedom, and homicide is judged. Then acknowledge what remains harsh or unequal. The Church's teaching that the Old Law was preparatory and imperfect allows us to recognize regulation of a damaged social order without treating every regulated practice as God's final moral ideal.

The covenant ceremony

Exodus 24 unfolds in a deliberate sequence. Moses reports the Lord's words, the people assent, an altar and twelve pillars are erected, sacrifices are offered, blood is divided, the book is read, the people assent again, and blood is sprinkled upon them. Moses then ascends with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders, who behold a manifestation of God and share a sacred meal in his presence. The covenant involves revealed words, a freely spoken response, sacrificial blood, appointed mediation, and communion.

What did the elders see?

Exodus 24 says that the elders saw the God of Israel, yet it describes only what was under his feet. Read this as a real but accommodated divine manifestation, not as a claim that they comprehended the divine essence. The text emphasizes both astonishing access and reverent restraint. They behold God, survive, and eat and drink before him.

Blood and the Eucharist

Exodus 24 directly supplies the covenant language used by Jesus over the cup. Hebrews also interprets the first covenant's inauguration through blood and contrasts repeated animal sacrifices with Christ's definitive self-offering. Catholic teaching does not claim that the Mass repeats Calvary. The Eucharist sacramentally makes present the one sacrifice of Christ and gives the faithful communion in the blood of the new covenant.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

From rescue to covenant communion

At Passover, sacrificial blood marked Israel for deliverance and the lamb was eaten. At Sinai, sacrificial blood ratifies the covenant and representatives of Israel eat in God's presence. These moments are distinct, but together they establish a pattern in which deliverance, sacrifice, covenant, and sacred eating belong to one saving movement.

The promised new covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34 promises a new covenant in which God's law will be written upon the heart and sins will be forgiven. At the Last Supper, Jesus identifies the cup with his blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. He does not discard the covenant pattern. He brings it to fulfillment in his own person and sacrifice.

The one definitive sacrifice

Hebrews 9:18-22 explicitly recalls Moses' use of blood when the first covenant was inaugurated. The same argument then directs attention to Christ, who enters the heavenly sanctuary through his own sacrifice. The animal sacrifices were preparatory signs. Christ's self-offering is definitive and cannot be repeated.

Sacred meal and communion

The elders' meal does not by itself prove the full Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. It does, however, show that covenant ratification moves toward communion in God's presence. In the New Testament, participation in the Eucharistic cup is called communion in the blood of Christ. The fulfillment exceeds the type because Christ is priest, victim, mediator, and food of the covenant people.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Augustine, 354-430

St. Augustine teaches that every visible sacrifice is a sacrament, or sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice by which the heart is offered to God. The outward rite is truthful when it expresses inward self-offering and communion with God.
The City of God 10.5.

How this is cited. This is a close summary of St. Augustine's distinction between visible sacrifice and the invisible sacrifice it signifies, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ask whether Israel's spoken assent and sacrificial worship are matched by a life genuinely offered to the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom, c. 347-407

St. John Chrysostom connects the blood used by Moses to initiate the old covenant with Christ's gift of his own blood at the table of the new covenant. The former pattern used sacrificial victims, while Christ gives himself.

Homilies on Matthew 82.5.

How this is cited. This is an honest summary of the comparison St. John Chrysostom makes while commenting on the Last Supper.

For the group. The fulfillment is not merely a better symbol. Jesus himself is the covenant sacrifice and the giver of the sacred meal.

St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274

Summary of his teaching: St. Thomas holds that the priesthood of the Old Law was a figure of the priesthood of Christ, so that Christ was not born of the stock of the figurative priests, and that the Old Law's rites could signify cleansing without effecting it as the sacraments of the New Law do.

Summa Theologiae III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2; cf. III, q. 62, a. 6.

How this is cited. Summary drawn from two places, not a quotation. The figure-of-Christ claim is in the reply to the second objection of q. 22, a. 1; the point that the Old Law's rites signified without conferring grace is argued separately at q. 62, a. 6.

For the group. Read Exodus 24 as a true covenant sacrifice that also points beyond itself to the saving work only Christ can accomplish.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1961. God chose Israel and revealed his Law to them, preparing for the coming of Christ.

CCC 1962. The Old Law is the first stage of revealed law, and its moral prescriptions are summed up in the Ten Commandments.

CCC 1963. The Old Law is holy, spiritual, and good, but still imperfect. It identifies sin without itself giving the grace of the Holy Spirit needed to fulfill the law.

CCC 1964. The Old Law prepares for the Gospel by teaching, prophesying, and foreshadowing the work of liberation that Christ fulfills.

CCC 2100. Outward sacrifice is genuine when it expresses the spiritual sacrifice of a heart offered to God.

CCC 1365. The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it makes present the sacrifice of the cross and applies its saving fruit.

CCC 1367. Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the Eucharistic sacrifice are one single sacrifice, offered once in a bloody manner on Calvary and made present sacramentally in the Mass.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Session 8 resolved the central answer: God brought Israel to himself. Tonight show what life with him entails, ordered justice, covenant obedience, worship, and communion in his presence.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Notice commands that protect truth and forbid joining a crowd in wrongdoing. Covenant loyalty must govern Israel even when social pressure points elsewhere.

God dwelling among his people (develop). The elders eat and drink before God, while Moses enters the cloud. Access is real, but still mediated and bounded by holiness.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Moses reports God's words, builds the altar, handles the blood, reads the covenant, leads the elders upward, and enters the cloud. Let the group feel both the gift and the limits of his mediation.

Deliverance through water (hold). Do not force the water thread tonight. Blood, sacrifice, and covenant communion take the foreground.

Where is the lamb? (develop). The Passover lamb remains behind the covenant scene, but Exodus 24 speaks more generally of burnt offerings and peace offerings. Develop the thread through the New Testament's identification of Jesus' own blood as the blood of the covenant.

The sealed guess (resolved). Do not repeat the opening exercise. Briefly recall the Session 8 discovery that God brought Israel out to bring the people to himself, then show covenant life taking concrete form.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If these laws come from God, does that mean God positively approves every social arrangement they regulate, including slavery and unequal treatment?

No. The Church teaches that the Old Law is divine, holy, and preparatory, yet imperfect. Begin with what each provision actually restrains or requires, and do not pretend the regulations are identical to the Gospel's final moral horizon. Christ fulfills the law, gives the Holy Spirit, deepens its demands, and reveals the full dignity of self-giving love.

Does the covenant meal in Exodus 24 prove the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist?

Not by itself. It establishes a biblical pattern joining covenant, sacrifice, blood, mediation, and sacred communion. The Catholic doctrine rests upon Christ's institution, the apostolic witness, and the Church's reception of those texts. Exodus illuminates that doctrine as type and preparation.

If Christ was sacrificed once for all, how can Catholics call the Mass a sacrifice?

Catholic doctrine fully affirms the once-for-all character of Calvary. The Mass is not another death or a repeated sacrifice. The same Christ and the same sacrifice are made sacramentally present under the signs he instituted, so the Church participates in and receives the fruit of his definitive offering.

Session Goals

1. Identify how the covenant commands shape worship, justice, responsibility, and care for vulnerable people.
2. Distinguish God's enduring moral instruction from juridical provisions belonging to Israel's preparatory stage of salvation history.
3. Reconstruct the sequence by which the covenant is ratified in Exodus 24.
4. Discover how the New Testament receives the language of covenant blood.
5. Explain why the Eucharistic sacrifice does not repeat Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.
6. Invite participants to connect covenant assent with concrete obedience during the coming week.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Plan about 10 minutes for prayer and Win, 12 minutes for the selected reading, 47 to 55 minutes for Build, 10 minutes for Send and Live It, and 5 minutes for memory and closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper portion of Question 3 first.
2. Then shorten Question 4 by asking for only two examples from the legal material.
3. Then take only one response to Question 11 before moving to Send.
4. Do not cut the covenant-ratification sequence, the live discovery, or the steelman chain.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Holy God, you rescued Israel and brought your people to yourself. Give us reverence before your word, patience with difficult passages, and honesty about the obedience your covenant asks of us. Lead us by your Spirit to recognize the saving work of Jesus, whose blood establishes the new covenant. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What makes an agreement feel like a real commitment rather than a casual promise?

W2. When have clear boundaries helped a friendship, workplace, team, or community become healthier?

Keep this warm and concrete. The questions prepare the room to notice that covenant belonging has both relational and practical shape.

Read

Read aloud

Use four readers. Reader one reads Exodus 20:22-26. Reader two reads Exodus 21:1-11 and 21:22-27. Reader three reads Exodus 22:20-27 and 23:1-9, 20-33. Reader four reads Exodus 24:1-18. Ask everyone to scan the portions not read aloud and mark one command that surprises, troubles, or attracts them.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

A covenant-shaped community

1. Before examining individual commands, what areas of Israel's life do these chapters address? Make a list from the headings and examples you noticed.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The commands reach into worship, altars, work, servants, personal injury, property, restitution, sexual conduct, treatment of immigrants, widows and orphans, lending, truthful testimony, courts, Sabbath rest, festivals, and relations with other nations. Covenant life is not confined to private belief or ritual moments.

2. Look especially at Exodus 22:20-27 and 23:1-9. Which people are vulnerable to being ignored or exploited, and what reasons does the Lord give Israel for treating them justly?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the people these provisions protect.

Ground. Ask what each provision actually restrains or requires.

Depth. Consider what it means that covenant worship and the treatment of the vulnerable arrive in the same breath.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text names the sojourner, widow, orphan, poor borrower, and the person needing a cloak at night, and it forbids perverting the justice due to the poor in a lawsuit. The enemy appears separately at Exodus 23:4-5, outside any court setting. Israel must remember its own experience as a sojourner in Egypt. The Lord also hears the cry of the afflicted. Covenant justice grows from God's character and from Israel's remembered rescue.

Dig Deeper

Compare the language of God hearing the vulnerable person's cry with Exodus 2:23-25. The people who were heard in their suffering must not become deaf to another person's suffering.

3. What do Exodus 23:1-3 and 23:6-8 reveal about the temptations that can corrupt justice? Which temptation feels most familiar in group life or online life?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Justice can be corrupted by false reports, crowd pressure, favoritism toward either rich or poor, denial of justice, false charges, and bribes. The text refuses to identify justice with whatever a crowd wants. Truth and impartial judgment remain necessary even when social pressure is intense.

Dig Deeper

Notice that biblical impartiality rejects both deference to the powerful and distortion of justice merely because someone is poor. Compassion and truthful judgment must remain together.

4. Some laws in Exodus 21 are disturbing, especially those concerning servants, bodily injury, and unequal social power. Without defending what the text does not defend, what limits on violence or exploitation can you actually observe in the chapter? What remains difficult?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name one protection or limit present in the chapter.

Ground. Distinguish regulation of an existing practice from presentation of a moral ideal.

Depth. Ask how the preparatory character of the Old Law preserves both its divine authority and the reality of moral development in salvation history.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The chapter provides release for an Israelite servant, condemns kidnapping with death, judges homicide, requires compensation for injuries, grants freedom when a servant suffers specified permanent injuries, and holds owners responsible in cases of lethal violence. These limits matter, but they do not remove every inequality or harsh feature. Catholic reading neither dismisses the passage nor treats every regulated arrangement as God's final moral ideal. The Old Law restrains evil and prepares for the fuller law of Christ.

Dig Deeper

If the discussion becomes abstract, ask participants to name the exact verse producing their concern. Careful reading is more honest than either quick condemnation or quick defense.

5. In Exodus 23:20-33, what does the promised messenger do, what response is required from Israel, and what dangers could break Israel's fidelity?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The messenger guards Israel, leads the people toward the prepared place, and bears divine authority. Israel must listen, obey, refuse rebellion, reject rival gods, and avoid covenants that become occasions of idolatry. God's promise does not make Israel's response irrelevant. Gift and obedience belong together.

Ratifying the covenant

6. Reconstruct Exodus 24:3-8 step by step. What happens first, next, and last? Pay attention to words, assent, altar, sacrifice, book, and blood.

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Put the steps of Exodus 24:3-8 in order.

Ground. Ask what each element contributes that the others do not.

Depth. Discuss why words, assent, sacrifice, blood, and a shared meal belong together in one covenant act.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses reports the Lord's words and ordinances. The people answer together that they will do what the Lord has spoken. Moses writes the words, builds an altar and twelve pillars, sends young men to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings, divides the blood, reads the book of the covenant, and receives the people's renewed assent. He then sprinkles blood upon the people and declares it the blood of the covenant.

7. Why do you think the people's assent appears twice, once before the written book is read ceremonially and again immediately before the blood is applied? What does that suggest about covenant obedience?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The repeated assent stresses that Israel is not a silent object in the ceremony. The people hear God's words and publicly accept the covenant obligation. Their response does not create God's grace, but it is a real act of consent. Covenant belonging includes both God's initiative and the people's accountable response.

Live discovery

In pairs, find and read the two passages. Circle repeated covenant words and underline what is new about the blood being offered.

Let them find it. Matthew 26:26-29; Hebrews 9:18-22

8. The phrase 'blood of the covenant' appears again at a decisive moment in the New Testament, and another New Testament writer explicitly looks back to Moses. What connections do you find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jesus takes the cup and identifies it with his own blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Hebrews recalls that the first covenant was inaugurated with blood and uses that pattern to explain the necessity of sacrificial cleansing. The decisive difference is that Jesus does not present the blood of another victim. He gives his own blood and establishes the promised new covenant.

Build the strongest shared ground

9. Using Exodus 24 and the passages you just found, build the strongest conclusion that Catholics and many Protestants can affirm together about sacrifice, covenant blood, and Jesus.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Sinai covenant was solemnly inaugurated through God's word, Israel's assent, sacrifice, and blood. This event was preparatory. Jesus fulfills the covenant pattern by offering his own blood for the forgiveness of sins. His death is the definitive covenant sacrifice, and no animal sacrifice can equal or replace it.

Press the reading

10. Now consider this strong Protestant objection. What does it affirm correctly, and where would a Catholic response press further?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Exodus 24 and the Last Supper point to Christ's death on Calvary, where the new covenant was established once for all. Hebrews insists that Christ's sacrifice is unrepeatable. Therefore, Christians should receive the Lord's Supper as a memorial proclamation of that completed sacrifice, but calling the Eucharist a sacrifice that makes Calvary present goes beyond these texts and risks weakening the sufficiency of the cross.

Answering from the text. The Catholic response begins by affirming the objection's central truth: Christ's sacrifice is complete, sufficient, and unrepeatable. The Mass is not another immolation. Yet Jesus gives the covenant cup within a ritual meal, and Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 record the command to do this in remembrance of him. Matthew's own account does not contain that command, so read those passages alongside it rather than reading them into it. The apostolic witness calls the cup a communion in Christ's blood. Catholic doctrine therefore speaks of sacramental presence, not repetition. The one sacrifice of Calvary is made present under sacramental signs so that the Church may participate in Christ's offering and receive its fruit.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection rightly protects the once-for-all character of the cross and warns against imagining a new sacrifice alongside Calvary. The Catholic reading protects the same truth while taking seriously Jesus' covenant action at the table and the New Testament language of participation in his blood. The disagreement is not over whether Christ died once. It concerns whether his instituted memorial is only a mental recollection and proclamation or a sacramental participation in the one sacrifice. Catholic teaching affirms the latter.

Presence, meal, and mediation

11. Read Exodus 24:9-18 again. What signs of access to God do you see, and what signs of distance or mediation remain?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders ascend, behold a manifestation of the God of Israel, survive, and eat and drink in his presence. This is remarkable covenant access. Yet boundaries remain. Moses alone is called farther up, Joshua goes up with him, the elders are told to wait below, and the cloud covers the mountain. God's glory dwells near Israel, but access remains ordered and mediated.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where is your life most tempted to say, 'I belong to God,' while resisting the concrete obedience that belonging requires?

S2. Which person or group might God be asking you to see more clearly because they are vulnerable to being ignored, misrepresented, or used?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Read Exodus 24:3-8 slowly on three different days. After each reading, pray, 'Lord, show me one thing you have spoken that I need to do.' Write down the concrete response.
2. Choose one command from Exodus 22:20-27 or 23:1-9 and practice its underlying demand for seven days. Examples include refusing to pass along an unverified accusation, returning something owed promptly, or giving practical help to someone under pressure.
3. Before Sunday Mass, arrive five minutes early and thank Jesus for his once-for-all sacrifice. During the words over the chalice, listen for the covenant language and consciously unite your life to his offering.
4. Make one act of restitution if you have damaged another person's property, reputation, time, or trust. If direct contact would be unsafe or unwise, ask a priest or mature Catholic mentor to help you choose a prudent form of repair.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 24:7

"All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

Exodus 24:7

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord Jesus Christ, mediator of the new covenant, you did not offer the blood of another but gave yourself for us. Write your law upon our hearts. Make our worship truthful, our promises faithful, and our treatment of others just. Draw us into communion with the Father, and teach us to offer our lives with you. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 20:22-24:18** Covenant commands, ratification, sacred meal, and Moses' ascent

Earlier Exodus roots

- **Exodus 2:23-25** God hears the cry of the oppressed
- **Exodus 12:1-28** Passover blood and meal
- **Exodus 19:1-8** Israel brought to God and called into covenant identity

Promise and fulfillment

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** Promise of the new covenant
- **Matthew 26:26-29** Jesus' blood of the covenant
- **1 Corinthians 10:16-18** Communion in the blood of Christ and sacrificial participation
- **Hebrews 9:18-28** The first covenant's blood and Christ's definitive sacrifice
- **Hebrews 10:1-18** Christ's once-for-all offering

Terms

- **berith.** Hebrew for covenant, a binding relationship established by solemn commitment
- **diatheke.** Greek term used in the New Testament for covenant

Catechism

- CCC 1961-1964. The Old Law is good and divinely given, yet preparatory and imperfect.
- CCC 2100. Outward sacrifice must express the heart's spiritual offering.
- CCC 1365. The Eucharist makes the sacrifice of the cross present.
- CCC 1367. Calvary and the Eucharist are one single sacrifice, not two competing sacrifices.