

Session 2: The Hope of Israel

Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Isaiah 43:16-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Exodus 24:3-11; 2 Maccabees 2:4-8

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers, from the prophets themselves, the great hopes Israel's Scriptures had planted: a new Moses, a new exodus, and a new covenant, hopes alive in Jewish streams of Jesus's day and visible in the crowd of John 6; and that at Sinai the covenant was sealed in blood and crowned by a meal in God's presence.

Catholic Touchstone. At the Last Supper Jesus declared the cup the new covenant in his blood, deliberately taking up both Jeremiah's promise and the covenant meal of Sinai (CCC 610-611, 1965).

What You Need to Know

Last week the group felt the scandal of John 6. This week we step back and ask a different question: what had Israel's Scriptures taught her to hope for? If we imagine first century Jews waiting vaguely for a wise teacher, the Eucharist will always look like it came from nowhere. But the prophets had given Israel a remarkably specific hope, and its shape is the shape of the exodus.

The logic runs like this. Israel's founding memory was the exodus: God raised up Moses, struck Egypt, fed his people with bread from heaven, and bound himself to them in a covenant sealed with blood and crowned with a meal on the mountain. When Israel later fell into exile, the prophets did not promise something unrelated. They promised it all again, and greater: a prophet like Moses, a new and more glorious exodus, and a new covenant that would succeed where the old one had been broken.

Hold the group to the texts tonight. The payoff comes at the end, when they read the covenant meal of Exodus 24 and hear, perhaps for the first time, how much of the Last Supper was already on that mountain: blood, the words of the covenant, and elders eating and drinking in the presence of God. One caution on sources: where this session touches Jewish traditions outside Scripture, the guide says so plainly. Our argument stands on the biblical texts; the traditions show how naturally Israel read them.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Moses promises that God will raise up a prophet like himself, from among the people, whose words Israel must heed. By the first century this had become a living expectation; when the crowds in John 6:14 see the multiplication of loaves, they say this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. Bread from heaven made them think of the new Moses.

Isaiah 43:16-21. Isaiah names God as the one who made a way through the sea, then delivers a shock: remember not the former things. God is about to do a new thing, a new way in the wilderness. The prophet who invokes the exodus announces a new thing shaped like it; the Church has long read here a new and greater exodus.

Jeremiah 31:31-34. The only place the Hebrew Scriptures use the phrase new covenant. It will not be like the covenant made when God took Israel by the hand out of Egypt, the covenant they broke. It will reach the heart, and its foundation is forgiveness of sins.

Exodus 24:3-11. How the first covenant was actually made: sacrifice, the blood of the covenant thrown on the people, the words of the covenant read aloud, and then the astonishing verse 11: the elders beheld God, and ate and drank. At Sinai, covenant, blood, and meal belong to one event.

Fulfillment. At the Last Supper Jesus says: this is my blood of the covenant (Matthew 26:28), this cup is the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20). One sentence fuses Exodus 24 and Jeremiah 31. The new Moses seals the new covenant the old way, in blood and at a meal, with himself as both.

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202)

A summary of his teaching: Irenaeus, taught by St. Polycarp, who was taught by the apostle John, insisted that the two Testaments have one Author, and that Christ recapitulates Israel's whole story, gathering it up and bringing it to its goal in himself. For Irenaeus, the exodus was not background to the Gospel; it was, as we might put it, its first draft.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine gave the Church her most famous rule for reading the two Testaments together: the New is hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New (*Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.73; cited at CCC 129). Tonight's session is that rule in practice: the Last Supper is hidden on Sinai, and Sinai is unveiled in the upper room.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386)

A summary of his catechesis: preparing new Christians for the sacraments, Cyril taught them to see the events of Israel, the exodus above all, as figures written for us, so that what God did once in shadow he now does in truth for the baptized at his table. The mystagogy of the early Church assumed exactly the reading this study is training your group to do.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 128-130: the Church reads the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen; typology discerns God's works of the Old Covenant as prefigurations of what he accomplished in Christ.
- CCC 610-611: at the supper Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free self-offering and instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his sacrifice.
- CCC 1339-1340: by celebrating the Supper within the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Passover its definitive meaning.
- CCC 1965: the New Law fulfills the promise of Jeremiah 31; the Catechism quotes the new covenant promise (through Hebrews 8).

THREAD WATCH

The command to eat. Add tonight's link quietly: the first covenant was not complete until they ate and drank in God's presence (Exodus 24:11). Do not connect it aloud to the Last Supper before the group does.

Sealed guesses. Collect the sealed My Guess sheets tonight and store them unopened until Session 10. If anyone forgot, they may bring it next week.

Session Goals

1. Recover the three-part hope of Israel from the prophets: new Moses, new exodus, new covenant.
2. Discover in Exodus 24 that covenant making culminates in blood and a shared meal before God.
3. Hear the Last Supper words as the deliberate fusion of Sinai and Jeremiah.
4. Answer the interior-covenant steelman honestly from the text.
5. Collect the sealed guesses.

A note on time. If you must cut, cut the second Win question and the Dig Deeper on 2 Maccabees. Keep Exodus 24; the session fails without it.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you kept every promise you made to Israel, and you kept them in ways greater than anyone imagined. Open the Scriptures to us tonight the way your Son opened them to his friends, until our hearts burn within us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening the Conversation

1. What is something you waited years for? While you waited, how specific was your picture of what it would look like when it came?
2. When you picture the people of Jesus's day waiting for the Messiah, what do you imagine they expected him to actually do?

Build: Into the Text

Leader: Tonight the group builds Israel's hope from the ground up, one text at a time. Assign readers as you go.

3. Read Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Who is promised here, and what makes him like Moses? Then have someone read John 6:14. When the crowd saw bread multiplied in the wilderness, who did they conclude Jesus was?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, from among their brethren, with God's own words in his mouth, whom Israel must heed. The crowd in John 6, fed with miraculous bread in a deserted place, concludes Jesus is the prophet who is to come. In their minds, bread in the wilderness is exactly what the new Moses would do.

This is why the crowd immediately raises the manna in John 6:31. Last week we filed that away; now the group can see why it was the obvious challenge: if you are the new Moses, where is the new bread from heaven?

4. Read Isaiah 43:16-21. Isaiah introduces God with unmistakable exodus language, then tells Israel to remember not the former things. What is he doing? What is the new thing shaped like?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He invokes the exodus (a way in the sea, chariots extinguished) precisely so that the promise of the new thing is heard as a new exodus: a way in the wilderness, water in the desert, a people formed for God's praise. The prophets repeatedly cast Israel's future salvation in exodus imagery, a deliverance the tradition has read as the exodus done again and done greater.

5. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. List everything the text itself says about the new covenant: with whom, unlike what, written where, resting on what?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

With the house of Israel and the house of Judah; not like the covenant of the exodus, which they broke; the law written upon their hearts (the stone tablets of Sinai stand behind the contrast, Exodus 31:18, though Jeremiah's own wording names only hearts); everyone knowing the Lord; and at its root, sins forgiven and remembered no more.

Note what Jeremiah does not say: he does not describe the ceremony by which this covenant will be made. For that, Israel knew where to look, because covenants are made a particular way. That is our next text.

6. Read Exodus 24:3-11, the making of the first covenant. Walk through it step by step: what happens with the blood, with the words, and, in verse 11, at the end? What surprises you?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Sacrifices are offered; Moses throws half the blood on the altar and, after the people vow obedience, throws the blood of the covenant on the people themselves; the book of the covenant is read aloud; and then Moses, Aaron, and seventy elders go up, behold God, and eat and drink. The covenant is sealed in blood (verse 8) and then crowned by a meal in God's presence (verses 9 to 11).

Most groups are startled by verse 11. Let them be. In Scripture, a covenant is not paperwork; it makes a family, and families eat together. At Sinai, blood and meal together are the covenant's grammar.

7. Now put the pieces together yourselves. Have someone read Matthew 26:27-28 and Luke 22:20. Which of tonight's texts is Jesus quoting or fulfilling in each phrase, and what is he claiming by saying it over a cup?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

My blood of the covenant repeats Moses's words over the blood at Sinai (Exodus 24:8). The new covenant takes up Jeremiah 31, the only Old Testament passage with that phrase, including its promise of the forgiveness of sins (Matthew adds: poured out for the forgiveness of sins). And he says it at a meal, completing the Sinai pattern.

The claim is staggering: the new Moses is sealing the new covenant, and the blood of this covenant is his own, given not to be splashed on the people but to be drunk by them. Last week's scandal is beginning to show its logic. Do not push further tonight; the study will earn the rest.

The Other Side of the Table

Leader: Read the objection at full strength.

The interior-covenant reading. Jeremiah's new covenant is explicitly interior: law on the heart, everyone knowing the Lord, sins forgiven. It says nothing about a ritual, a meal, or a sacrament. Reading the Eucharist into it imports ceremony into a promise whose whole point was to move beyond ceremony to the heart. The new covenant is a relationship, not a rite.

8. Strengthen it first: what is the best case that the new covenant was meant to leave ritual behind?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Good additions: Jeremiah elsewhere attacks empty ritual (Jeremiah 7); the letter to the Hebrews says the old sacrifices could not perfect the conscience; and Jesus criticized externalism in worship.

9. Now answer from the texts we read tonight. Does interior mean unritual? Who defined how the new covenant would be enacted?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The answer is not a theory; it is an event. Jesus himself, the night before he died, enacted the new covenant with a cup, a meal, and covenant blood, using Sinai's own words. If the new covenant excluded rite and meal, its own maker enacted it otherwise: interior transformation and divinely given signs are not opposites, and Jesus joined them in one cup.

And the opposition is false: at Sinai the covenant was both blood ceremony and vowed obedience of the heart; what God faulted was not that Israel had rites but that their hearts broke the covenant the rites sealed. Jeremiah promises a covenant that reaches the heart, and Jesus seals it in a way that enters the body: a cup that is drunk. Interior does not get more interior than that. What the prophets never imagined was not that the new covenant would have a meal, but whose blood would be in the cup.

Be honest about scope: nothing tonight yet establishes what the Eucharist is; that question waits for the Passover, the manna, and the Bread of the Presence. Tonight establishes the frame: covenant, blood, meal, together.

DIG DEEPER: The Hidden Vessels (2 Maccabees 2:4-8)

Read 2 Maccabees 2:4-8, a passage from the deuterocanonical books that many in your group may never have opened. At the exile, Jeremiah hides the tent and the ark, and declares they will stay hidden until God gathers his people again and the glory appears, as it did for Moses.

Ask: what does this tell us about how Jews at the time connected the coming restoration with the wilderness era and its worship? Jewish hope was not vague; it expected the return of God's glory and God's dwelling, and later Jewish tradition, in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch 29:8, written around the end of the first century), even voiced the hope that the treasury of manna would descend again. That last expectation is outside Scripture, later than the apostles, and held lightly; the group will meet its biblical roots in Session 5.

Send: Taking It With You

10. God kept his promises in a form greater than the promise itself. Where might you be underestimating what God intends to do with a promise you are waiting on?

11. You are in the new covenant Jeremiah announced. When you receive the cup at Mass, what would it mean to receive it as covenant blood, the way the elders ate and drank on the mountain?

Live It This Week

- Read Exodus 24:3-11 once more this week, then read Luke 22:14-20 immediately after, and write down every echo you hear.
- At Mass, when the chalice is elevated, silently pray: the new covenant in your blood; count me among your covenant family.
- If you have never read the deuterocanonical books, read 2 Maccabees 2 this week as a start.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. **Jeremiah 31:31***

Closing Prayer

Together: Father of the covenant, you wrote your law on stone and now you write it on hearts. Write it on ours. Seal us in the blood of your Son, seat us at his table, and make us a people formed for your praise. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Passage	Used For
Deuteronomy 18:15-18	Prophet like Moses; live discovery
John 6:14, 6:31	Crowd identifies Jesus as the prophet; manna challenge explained
Isaiah 43:16-21	New exodus promise; live discovery
Jeremiah 31:31-34	New covenant text; live discovery; steelman text
Exodus 24:3-11	Blood of the covenant and the meal before God; hinge of the session
Matthew 26:27-28; Luke 22:20	Last Supper words fusing Sinai and Jeremiah
Jeremiah 7 (reference)	Steelman support: critique of empty ritual
2 Maccabees 2:4-8	Dig Deeper: exile, hidden tent and ark, expected return of glory
Jeremiah 31:31	Memory verse