

THE STORY OF SALVATION

Finding Your Place in God's Plan



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THE STORY OF SALVATION

Finding Your Place in God's Plan

By Katie O'Donnell and Kevin Cotter

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INTRODUCTION

Goal for this chapter: That all participants know the importance of understanding God's story through His covenants.

Note to the leader: Please take a moment to watch the "Story of Salvation" introduction video (not the leader's introduction) with your group. This video introduces the concept of covenant and the importance of knowing our story, the story of salvation. Let your group know that you will be watching the video this week to introduce the study. The introductory video is the only video you will show to your group. The other videos for chapters 1-7 are meant for your preparation only.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were your reactions to Evelyn Waugh's story?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

2. In the video, Kevin talked about the chaos that exists in the world. Have you ever experienced this before?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

3. How have you experienced God's plan during your life? How did these moments change you?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

4. If you had to explain a covenant to someone, what would you say? What's the difference between a contract and a covenant?

Answer: A contract is an exchange of goods or services (e.g., a cell phone contract or rental agreement). A covenant is an exchange of persons where an oath is sworn, and people are changed (e.g., marriage).

5. What does a covenant say about who God is?

Answer: God is willing to give Himself to us, even if we don't deserve it. He is overabundant in His desire to give Himself to others.

6. Do you always view God this way? If not, what are some obstacles that prevent that?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

7. In the past, how have you interacted with Scripture? Were you able to see the whole story?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

8. Why do you think understanding the big picture of Scripture is important?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. It shows that God has a plan for the history of mankind and for our own lives as well.

9. Imagine that you are sitting here after finishing the whole study. What's one thing that you are hoping to get out of studying the story of salvation?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.



ADAM ONE COUPLE SYMBOL: SABBATH



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 6 - 11

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 12 - 17

Goal: That all participants know that they are beloved sons and daughters of God through His covenant with Adam, sealed by the Sabbath.

Note to the leader: Some of the content in this chapter is similar to the first chapter of "The Crux." If you have recently studied that chapter, be sure to highlight some of the key differences. Identity and the Sabbath might be good subjects to emphasize. Another option is to tell your group that some of this content is similar and ask them if they have gained any new understanding of these topics.



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 1:26–28, 2:16–17, 3:1–7, 2:1–3

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: Creation Stories

The story of salvation begins in the book of Genesis with creation. Oftentimes when we approach a text like Genesis, we can start to think about questions of science and evolution. Those questions are very good, but those won't be covered in this chapter. Feel free to ask a FOCUS missionary or check the catechism for answers to those questions. Today, we are going to explore the question: *Why* was the world created?

Context for Our Story Today: Image and Likeness

Genesis 1:26–28

God sets His very image and likeness in Adam and Eve, as well as in each of us. But what does “image and likeness” mean? For the ancient Hebrews, it meant more than just having some godlike qualities. In fact, the next time this word is used in Genesis, it describes the relationship between Adam and his own son, Seth: Adam “became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named

him Seth" (Gn 5:3). This shows us that being made in the image and likeness of God is meant to communicate an intimate relationship. Adam and Eve, and each one of us, are beloved children of God. Thus, from their creation, Adam and Eve had a deep, familial relationship with God as their loving Father.

However, this identity as beloved sons and daughters immediately comes under attack. Once we see and understand the depth of Adam and Eve's relationship with God, their upcoming fall becomes even more dramatic.

CLIMAX: IDENTITY CRISIS

Genesis 2:16–17

In Genesis 2:16–17, God gives Adam and Eve a commandment: Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, why would God, a loving father, give Adam and Eve this command? We know that God wants only their good, so He knew this tree was bad for them. But this raises another question: Why have a bad tree in the garden in the first place?

The answer is freedom. God gives us the power to choose, and this free will allows us to love. So God offers His law—only one rule, to give Adam and Eve the opportunity to love. If they had no choice, they would be either robots or slaves. God's desire is for a loving relationship.

Genesis 3:1–7

The serpent intervenes at this critical moment of choice. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent asks Eve, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any

of the trees of the garden?” But this isn’t what God commanded; only *one* tree was forbidden. The serpent is trying to get Eve to doubt God’s goodness by exaggerating the command.

Eve responds by affirming God’s commandment—and then she takes it just a little bit further. She says that even if she touches it, she will die. But this isn’t specifically what God commanded: He didn’t say anything about *touching* the fruit. Eve is already slipping into distrust.

Then comes Satan’s lie: “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” In other words, he is saying, “God is holding out on you. You could be someone else. You could do better.”

Now, here is the irony: Who are Adam and Eve already like? God! They are being tempted to pursue something that they already have. But the lie works: As the Catechism states, “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command” (CCC 397). They abandon what they knew of God’s fatherhood, quickly exchanging it for a false perception of Him as cruel and distant, limiting their freedom.

APPLICATION: THE SABBATH

Genesis 2:1–3

Since Adam and Eve, the temptation to define ourselves apart from God is enduring. People often seek their identity in everything but God: Whether it be sports, academics, relationships, etc., we are constantly looking to find our value and worth in the things of this world. How can we get back to trusting in God’s love for us, knowing that He is taking care of us, and that our deepest identity lies in our relationship with Him?

It is almost as if God knew this was going to be a problem for us: In Genesis 2:1–3, we read that “God rested on the seventh day” and that He “blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” We know this as the Sabbath.

Why is this seventh day so special? And what difference does the Sabbath make for us? Breaking down the word Sabbath can help give us the answer.

In Hebrew, the word for “Sabbath” is *shebbath*. At the root of *shebbath* is the Hebrew word *sheba*, which can be translated to mean “oath,” as in a covenant, or simply “seven.” As you may remember from the introduction, a covenant is an exchange of persons, wherein the two parties give themselves to one another so completely that they actually become family (as in marriage).

The Hebrews would have immediately recognized the use of the “seven days” imagery as significant: God is making a covenant with Adam and Eve. In creation itself, He wanted to establish His fatherhood and remind us of our covenant relationship with Him.

Both ancient and modern Jews celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday. As Catholics, we refer to the Sabbath as the Lord’s Day, celebrating it on Sunday, because it is the day of Jesus’ resurrection. God gives us the Sabbath to remind us to Whom we truly belong. We are sustained not merely by our work—as slaves would be—but by Him. On the Sabbath, we remember to trust Him as our Father and provider and honor the relationship we have with Him as sons and daughters. Going to Mass on Sunday is our reminder to find our identity in God, our Father, and not in the things of this world. (For further reading, see CCC 2168–96.)

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned that God created man in His image and likeness, and that this means we are beloved sons and daughters of God. Our relationship with Him forms our deepest identity. We also saw how Adam and Eve fall into sin by not trusting in God's fatherly care for them. Finally, we discussed how the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of our covenant with God our Father, and that our true identity lies in Him, rather than other things. The symbol to remember this covenant is the Sabbath, represented by the number 7 on the calendar.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 1:26-28, 2:16-17, 3:1-7, 2:1-3

OPENER:

1. Throughout the ages, what are some of the biggest questions that human beings have asked about life?

(Share aloud with your group.)

Today, we are going to look at a story that answers some of those big questions: the creation account in Genesis. It's here that we learn about God's first covenant with Adam, and what it teaches us about who we are and what we were made for.

CONTEXT: IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Read Genesis 1:26-28

2. In Genesis 1:26, God makes man in His image and likeness. What does this mean?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Note: Wait until the next question to reveal that it means we are sons and daughters of God.

3. Let's look at another passage of Scripture to dig deeper into this concept. Could someone please read Genesis 5:3? In light of this, what does being made in God's image and likeness mean?

Answer: It means that we are beloved sons and daughters, and that God is our father.

4. Genesis reveals that being beloved sons and daughters is our deepest identity, but oftentimes we struggle to embrace that identity. What are some other things, good or bad, that can define our identity?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers may include: careers, sports, success, social circles, attention on social media, relationships, sexuality, etc.

CLIMAX: IDENTITY CRISIS

Read Genesis 2:16–17

5. Why do you think God gives Adam and Eve the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Answer: God wanted to give them an opportunity to express their love for Him. Without this choice, they would be slaves, not sons—always destined to do whatever God says. The command gives them a free choice; there is no love without freedom.

Read Genesis 3:1–7

6. In Genesis 3:1, the devil enters the story. Reflecting on the serpent's words to Eve in this verse, how does the devil try to twist Eve's perception of God's identity?

Answer: The serpent wants Eve to question whether God is really

trustworthy and tempts her to doubt God's goodness. He portrays God as withholding things from her, as opposed to a loving father who made her for freedom.

7. What is wrong with Eve's response to the serpent? Turn back to Genesis 2:16–17 for God's original command.

Answer: Eve exaggerates God's commandment; He says nothing about touching the fruit. Already she is falling into the trap of identifying God as a strict, merciless lawgiver.

8. In Genesis, there is a drama between Adam and Eve viewing God as a loving Father or a restrictive lawgiver. Our own feelings about God can sometimes be very similar, depending on the situation. Throughout your life, how have you viewed God?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: THE SABBATH

Read Genesis 2:1–3

(Share aloud with your group.)

As we read through the story of salvation, we will see how God's covenants grow and expand—each with their own symbol. Here, the symbol of the first covenant is the Sabbath, a day of rest set aside to reconnect with God and focus on our relationship with Him.

In Hebrew, the word for “Sabbath” is *shebbath*. At the root of *shebbath* is the Hebrew word *sheba*, which can be translated to mean “oath,” as in a covenant, or simply “seven.” As you may remember from the introduction, a covenant is an exchange of persons, wherein the two parties give themselves to one another so completely that they actually become family (as in marriage).

The Hebrews would have immediately recognized the use of the “seven days” imagery as significant: God is making a covenant with Adam and Eve. In creation itself, He wanted to establish His fatherhood and remind us of our covenant relationship with Him.

9. Does that make sense? Can someone explain the Sabbath?

Answer: Allow the group to answer and discuss.

10. How do you view going to Mass on Sundays?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

11. How should we view going to Mass on Sunday?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Sunday is a day set apart to remind ourselves that our deepest identity is in our relationship with God. We should set aside our earthly pursuits and remember that our worth comes from God, not the things we have or do.

12. God gives us the Sabbath as time to set aside to rest and remember our deepest identity: that we are sons and daughters of God. Do you consider yourself first and foremost a son or daughter of the Father? Is it your deepest identity, and what does that mean?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

13. Why do you think God commands us to rest on the Sabbath?

Answer: To rest on the Sabbath is a reminder that we are not slaves but sons and daughters of a loving Father. A slave of a master never has the opportunity to rest from his work; having a day of rest reminds us that God desires a fatherly relationship with us and that He has made us for freedom.

14. Why is it so hard to rest?

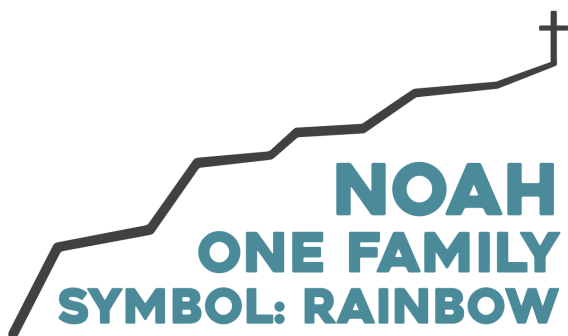
Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Many people in our culture today find their identity outside of their relationship with God, and so they have come to value other things. Sometimes we cannot or will not rest, for fear of losing those things we are chasing.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, we learned that God created man in His image and likeness and that this means we are beloved sons and daughters of God. Our relationship with Him forms our deepest identity. We also saw how Adam and Eve fall into sin by not trusting in God's fatherly care for them. Finally, we discussed how the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of our covenant with God our Father, and that our true identity lies in Him, rather than other things. The symbol to remember this covenant is the Sabbath, represented by the number 7 on the calendar.

*For a further exploration of the Fall and its consequences, see chapter 1 of "The Crux, Chapter 1."



NOAH ONE FAMILY SYMBOL: RAINBOW



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 20 - 25

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 26 - 29

Goal: That through God's covenant with Noah all participants would understand that God is faithful, even when we are not.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 6:11–18, 9:18–28, 9:13–17

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: The Growth of Sin

The effects of Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God are swift and dramatic. Shortly after their exile from Eden, we already find violence within their family: Their son Cain murders his brother Abel.

After Cain’s violent crime, he is sent into further exile from his parents and his remaining brother, Seth. God curses Cain’s line of descendants. The future generations of his line become known for their crimes, violence, and sexual sins, while Seth’s descendants are to follow the law of the Lord and remain separated from Cain’s line. Before long, however, the two lines begin intermarrying, infecting Seth’s descendants with the sins and behaviors of Cain’s line. Finally, God looks upon His creation, and where He once “saw that it was good,” He now sees only worldwide wickedness.

Context for Our Story Today: God’s Covenant with Noah

Genesis 6:11–18

In looking down upon the earth, God finds only one righteous man: Noah (Gn 6:8, Gn 7:1). God reveals to Noah His dramatic plan: He is going to destroy the corrupted earth for the sake of a cosmic restoration. He asks Noah to build an ark, which will save innocent life, and promises that after the flood, He will establish a new covenant with Noah that will extend to his whole family. Through Noah's family, the entire human family is to be restored.

The terrible flood comes, but in the midst of the storm, Scripture says, "God remembered Noah" (Gn 8:1). He remembered the promise He made to Noah before the flood—that He would spare him and re-establish His covenant through his family, bringing life back into the world. For the next 150 days, the waters recede. Finally, nearly a full year later, Noah and his family are able to leave the ark, by which they had been delivered from destruction—because God is faithful to His promises.

In the wake of the flood's destruction, we see a kind of re-creation, a new creation, paralleling the old. The first covenant was made with Adam and Eve, a married couple. This new covenant expands beyond a couple to an entire family: Noah and his wife, their sons, and their sons' wives.

Through this family, God gives humanity a second chance. But immediately, another attack ensues.

CLIMAX: HAM'S REBELLION

Genesis 9:18–28

Soon after Noah and his family depart the ark and step into the new creation, Noah gets drunk in his vineyard and passes out, leaving his wife vulnerable to attack.

The language used in Genesis is that Ham, Noah's youngest son, "saw the nakedness of his father." The Book of Leviticus gives us an indication of what this might mean: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness" (18:7, RSV (Revised Standard Version)). We can understand this verse even better when we read the same verse in the NAB (New American Bible), which translates the Hebrew idiom about uncovering the nakedness of your father: "You shall not disgrace your father by having intercourse with your mother. She is your own mother; you shall not have intercourse with her" (Lv 18:7; see also Lv 20:11).

In other words, it was likely that Ham raped his mother while Noah was passed out, drunk. In ancient times, such a rape would have been a power play against the head of the family. We see a similar example of this with David and his son, Absalom, in the second Book of Samuel, chapter 16. Absalom rebels against David, and in order to usurp his father's kingship, he sleeps with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel. In the same way, Ham's sin was an act of rebellion against his father and his older brother, Shem, the firstborn and, thus, the recipient of his father's blessing.

When Noah awakens and realizes what has happened, he cannot curse Ham, because Ham has been blessed by God through the covenant. Instead, he curses "Canaan"—an interesting move, because Canaan is not born until later. It is possible, therefore, that Canaan—father of the Canaanites, Israel's enemy for generations to come—is the son of Noah's wife, and his conception was the result of Ham's incestuous rape.

This sin has disastrous consequences throughout the rest of the Old Testament, and it shows us that sin has consequences beyond ourselves. Even our "private" sins can have devastating effects on those around us. Like Adam in the garden, Noah, who should have

been guarding and protecting what was entrusted to him, instead allowed evil to take hold in his family.

APPLICATION: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Genesis 9:13–17

Even though the wickedness of human sin is present both before and after the flood, the Lord has proven Himself faithful. Upon bringing Noah's family forth from the ark, God establishes His covenant, as He promised, and seals it with the sign of the rainbow. Despite how quickly the human family falls back into sin, the rainbow is a reminder that God will never allow a flood to destroy the earth again. We are unfaithful, but He is faithful. When His bow appears in the sky, we can remember that He fulfills His promises to us, as well.

It is fitting that this covenant extends to Noah's family. As we saw in the story of Ham, sin has particularly devastating effects upon the family—but God promises to be faithful, even in our families.

Interestingly, it always has to be raining to see a rainbow. In other words, it is when we are tested that we can become most aware of God's faithfulness. It is in the midst of life's storms that we are reminded of His promises. The seven colors of the rainbow also remind us of the Hebrew significance of the number seven and the sacredness of a newly formed covenant.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned about the dramatic consequences of sin. But, God's covenant with Noah reminds us that, even in the midst of incredible wickedness, God is faithful to His promises. In our own lives, we can see the terrible effects that sin has had, maybe even particularly in our own family. But in the midst of our worst sins and the storms of life, God will be faithful, even when we are not. The symbol of the rainbow is a reminder that God will never abandon us.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 6:11–18, 9:18–28, 9:13–17

OPENER:

1. Have you ever made a mistake and then wondered whether people would treat you differently afterward?

(Share aloud with your group.)

In the story of Noah, we are going to hear about how God is faithful, even when we are not. After Adam and Eve turn away from God, things start to get even worse for humanity—but God is our father and does not abandon His children.

CONTEXT: GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

Read Genesis 6:11–18

2. What's happened to the world since Adam and Eve?

Answer: Humanity has grown wicked.

3. What two things does God tell Noah that He is going to do?

Answer: The first is that God is going to bring a flood upon the earth to destroy all He has made. The second is that God will establish a covenant with Noah, saving his family so that the human race can continue.

4. What do you think Noah must have been thinking when he heard this command?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

5. Have you ever felt God asking you to do something that would require radical trust in His plan?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

6. In the midst of the storm, Genesis 8:1 says, “God remembered Noah.” What does this tell us about God?

Answer: This tells us that God is faithful. We can trust Him, even in the midst of life’s storms, because He will not forget His children.

CLIMAX: HAM’S REBELLION

Read Genesis 9:18–28

7. This sounds like a weird story. What do you think is going on in this passage?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. (As the leader, don’t reveal the answer yet.) Note: For questions 7 & 8 be prepared with different translations of the Bible. You need both the RSV (Revised Standard Version) and the NAB (New American Bible). If you don’t have a hard copy in your group, be prepared to look them up on a phone or computer.

8. In many ways, this passage doesn’t seem to make sense. The passage says that Noah got drunk and that his son, Ham, saw his nakedness, told his brothers about it, and then his brothers covered Noah with a blanket. When Noah wakes up, he curses Canaan, Ham’s son, who isn’t even born yet. Part of the problem in understanding this passage is the Hebrew idiom “uncovering the father’s nakedness.” This idiom hides the exact details of the story. Let’s Read Leviticus 18:7 to help us understand this

passage, first in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible. Did this help you understand the passage?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

9. Let's read Leviticus 18:7, the same verse we just read, this time in the New American Bible (NAB), where the idiom is translated. In light of this verse, what did Ham do?

Answer: Ham slept with his mother while his Father was passed out drunk, then he went and bragged to his brothers about it.

10. Why would Ham have done such a thing?

Answer: It was an opportunity for Ham to usurp power. By sleeping with his mother, Ham was proclaiming that he was the real master of the household. This was not an unheard-of power play in the ancient world. (For more, see 2 Sm 16:20–22.)

11. What do Ham's actions demonstrate about human sin and brokenness?

Answer: We have all been deeply affected by the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We can see that our tendency toward wickedness will not be fixed by improving our external conditions. Only a divine remedy can change the human heart.

12. Ham's sin has destructive consequences: His line of descendants through his son Canaan (the Canaanites) will be a constant obstacle to Israel's faithfulness throughout the rest of the Old Testament. We can sometimes think that our "private" sins don't have far-reaching consequences. How do you think our sins affect the world around us? How would things be different if we didn't commit those sins?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Read Genesis 9:13–17

13. What should we remember when we see the rainbow?

Answer: The sign of the rainbow symbolizes God's promise never to destroy the earth by a flood again. When we see the rainbow, we can remember that our Father is faithful to His promises.

14. What are some ways you have seen God's faithfulness play out during the storms of your life?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

15. God makes His covenant with Noah within the context of his family. Similarly, God offers His covenant to us within the context of our (often broken and dysfunctional) families. It can be difficult to see how God is working within our families, but God will be faithful even when we are not. How can we grow in our trust of God's faithfulness, even amidst difficulties within our families?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, we learned about the dramatic consequences of sin. But, God's covenant with Noah reminds us that, even in the midst of incredible wickedness, God is faithful to His promises. In our own lives, we can see the terrible effects that sin has had, maybe even particularly in our own family. But in the midst of our worst sins and the storms of life, God will be faithful, even when we are not. The symbol of the rainbow is a reminder that God will never abandon us.



ABRAHAM ONE TRIBE SYMBOL: STARS



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 32 - 37

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 38 - 43

Goal: That through God's covenant with Abraham and his struggle with Lot, all participants would learn to be faithful to God.



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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 12:1–5, 12:10–20, 13:14–16, 15:1–6, 15:12

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: A Faithful Lineage

After Noah, humanity once again falls into rebellion, culminating with the Tower of Babel, and the human family is thrust into further exile. However, the line of Noah's son Shem remains faithful, and one of his descendants, Abram, is the next chosen vessel for the Lord's covenant.

Context for Our Story Today: Three Promises

Genesis 12:1–3

God gives Abram three instructions, followed by three promises: Abram is to leave his land, his kindred, and his father's household. In return, God promises to bless him with a great nation, a great name, and bring about a worldwide blessing through Abram's line. This is an incredible series of promises, since at this point in time, Abram is 75 years old and has no children.

In the ensuing chapters of Genesis, God’s promises to Abram will be made into three covenants. In Genesis 15, God will make a covenant with Abram regarding land (great nation); in Genesis 17, God will make a covenant with Abram regarding a royal dynasty (great name); and finally, in Genesis 22, God will make a covenant with Abram regarding a worldwide blessing.

These covenants lay out a road map for the rest of the covenants in the story of salvation. The covenant of land will be fulfilled with Moses; the covenant of royal dynasty will be fulfilled with David; and the covenant of worldwide blessing will be fulfilled with Jesus Christ. (See the chart below.)

Promise to Abram	Covenant with Abram	Fulfillment in Salvation History
Land/Nation (Gn 12:2)	Genesis 15	Covenant with Moses
Royal Dynasty (Gn 12:2)	Genesis 17	Covenant with David
Worldwide Blessing (Gn 12:3)	Genesis 22	New Covenant through Jesus Christ

CLIMAX: ABRAM’S “LOT” IN LIFE

Genesis 12:4–5

God calls Abram to leave everything behind, including his extended family, and travel to a new land. Amazingly, Abram responds faithfully to this call—mostly. We read, “So Abram went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.” But who is Lot? In Genesis 12:5, we learn that Lot is Abram’s nephew (his brother’s son)—one of his kindred. Lot isn’t supposed to come.

Abram was willing to sacrifice so much by traveling to a new land. Why would he also disobey the Lord's command by bringing Lot? First, remember that Abram has no descendants: If he remains childless, none of God's promises will be possible. He will have no one to carry on his name or inheritance—two very important concerns for the people of Abram's time. So what is Abram doing? He is trying to be faithful to God *and* his own plan. Lot is Abram's "exit strategy" or "security blanket," just in case God's promises don't work out. Abram is keeping his options open by bringing Lot, a kind of surrogate son. He is being faithful, but he is also covering his bases.

Genesis 12:10-20

Abram travels to the new land to which God had called him, but almost immediately upon his arrival, a famine strikes. The famine forces Abram to go to Egypt, where he is met with an array of new problems. He knows that his wife, Sarai, is beautiful; he worries that the Egyptians will want to take her, and he fears for his own life as her husband. Instead of praying to God for guidance, He takes matters into his own hands and tells Sarai to lie, saying she is his sister. She does so, and eventually, the pharaoh takes her as his bride.

Finally, God steps into the mess Abram has made and sends a series of plagues upon Egypt. When the pharaoh discovers the truth about Sarai, he sends her back to Abram so that the plagues will stop. At last, Abram and Sarai leave Egypt and return to the land God intended for them.

This story seems like a strange addition to Abram's journey, but once we understand that Abram is only being half faithful, it all makes sense. Abram is running into trouble because he isn't following God's plan. God can't fulfill His promises, because Abram isn't allowing Him

to do so. By keeping Lot around, Abram is trying to have it both ways: God's and his. It's much like our lives, where we want to be faithful to God, but we want to keep our own plans, too.

APPLICATION: OUR "LOT" IN LIFE

Genesis 13:14-16

Finally, upon their arrival in the land to which God sent them, Abram and Lot part ways. Immediately after Abram lets Lot go, the Lord (who has been noticeably silent since Abram left home with his nephew) speaks and reminds Abram of His promise. Only after Abram lets go of Lot can the promise be fulfilled. Like our own lives, for God's plan to fully come about, we need to let go of the things that we look to for security. When we do, God is able to act in ways that He couldn't before.

Genesis 15:1-6, Genesis 15:12

Even after he lets go of Lot, Abram still has more room to grow. The Lord speaks to him, telling him not to fear, but Abram respectfully reminds God of his problem: He has no son, no heir to inherit this promised reward. The name "Abram" means "exalted father," which seems more like a cruel joke than anything else to this elderly man.

God responds to Abram by bringing him outside: "Number the stars, if you can," He says; "just so shall your descendants be." The Scriptures then tell us, "Abram put his faith in the Lord." This is a breakthrough moment for Abram, but the author includes a subtle detail later in the chapter that makes this story all the more dramatic. In verse 12, it says, "as the sun was about to set." This means that when God asked

Abram to count the stars, it was actually broad daylight. So, in fact, Abram *couldn't* count the stars. He is told that his descendants will be like these stars...that he can't see. With this image, God is once again reminding Abram, "You can trust Me. Even though you can't see how this is possible, it will happen."

Oftentimes we are afraid to let go of our "Lot" because we can't see the outcome. Regardless of whether the reward is visible, we must trust in God's faithfulness. This does not mean we trust Him to give us what we want or eventually make our plans come true; when we give everything to God, we won't necessarily be rewarded by getting it all back. But what He promises is far more satisfying: He gives us Himself. In the face of our problems, His answer is always, "I am with you"—not necessarily, "I will fix it."

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned that God made three promises to Abram, each one corresponding to the next three covenants in the story of salvation. God elevates these promises to covenants that extend to Abram's entire tribe. We also discussed Abram's battle to let go of Lot and how we need to let go of our own "Lot" in life. Finally, we discussed Abram's faithfulness, even though he couldn't see how God was going to fulfill His promises. The symbol of the stars reminds us to be faithful even when we can't see how things are going to work out.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 12:1–5, 12:10–20, 13:14–16, 15:1–6, 15:12

OPENER:

1. Have you ever known you needed to change or let go of something in your life, but you just couldn't do it?

(Share aloud with your group)

In the last chapter, we looked at Noah and humanity's second fall from grace. Now, we will explore arguably the most important figure of the Old Testament: Abram. With Abram, God is going to lay out a roadmap for the rest of the covenants within the story of salvation.

CONTEXT: THREE PROMISES

Read Genesis 12:1–3

2. What is God asking Abram to do, and what does He promise in return?

Answer: God asks Abram to leave his land, his kindred (or extended family), and his father's house. In return, God promises to bless him with land, a great name or dynasty, and a line of descendants that will bring about a blessing for all the families of the earth.

3. Reference the Covenant Roadmap Chart below. Explain to your group how Genesis 12:1–3 is a roadmap for the rest of God’s relationship with Abram and for the future covenants in the story of salvation. Show your group the chart, if necessary.

Promise to Abram	Covenant with Abram	Fulfillment in Salvation History
Land/Nation (Gn 12:2)	Genesis 15	Covenant with Moses
Royal Dynasty (Gn 12:2)	Genesis 17	Covenant with David
Worldwide Blessing (Gn 12:3)	Genesis 22	New Covenant through Jesus Christ

4. Later, we learn that Abram is 75 years old, and that he and Sarai have no children. Yet all of God’s promises to Abram depend on his having descendants. What do you think Abram was thinking when God made these amazing promises to him?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

CLIMAX: ABRAM’S “LOT” IN LIFE

Read Genesis 12:4–5

5. Looking at Genesis 12:4–5, does Abram obey God’s request?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Note to leader: Most likely, your group won’t mention Lot. If they don’t know the answer or don’t give the right answer, move on to the next question.

6. Small details in Scripture can mean big things. One small detail in this passage is that Abram brings Lot with him. Who is Lot?

Answer: Lot is Abram’s nephew (Gn 12:5).

7. Does bringing Lot go against God's command?

Answer: Yes! God asked Abram to leave his kindred behind (Gn 12:2).

8. Why do you think Abram brings Lot anyway?

Answer: Abram brings Lot because he has no children: At 75 years old, his biggest fear is that he will have no heir (despite the fact that, for any of God's three promises to come about, He would need to give Abram a son). Lot was Abram's back-up plan, in case God's promises didn't work out. Abram thinks that if he holds onto Lot, he can still have a surrogate son.

Read Genesis 12:10–20

9. Because Abram is only being half faithful, he starts running into trouble. What kinds of problems arise once Abram leaves his homeland?

Answer: First, he is met with a famine. Abram tries to avoid the famine by leaving for Egypt, but upon arriving he fears for his life because he knows the Egyptians will want his beautiful wife, Sarai. So Abram spins a web of lies and, pretending to be her brother, gives Sarai to the pharaoh.

APPLICATION: OUR "LOT" IN LIFE

10. Like Abram, each of us can sometimes have our backup plans to God's plan—our own "Lot"—and keeping our "Lot" can lead us into trouble. What is your "Lot" in life?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Note to leader: This can be a tough question. Don't be afraid to wait for an answer. Be prepared to give an example from your own life if necessary. Feel free to re-word the question to get your group to share.

Read Genesis 13:14–16

11. Abram and Lot have just parted ways. Immediately after Lot leaves, God speaks to Abram. What does this tell us about God's ways?

Answer: God was simply waiting for Abram to let go of his own plans and fully place his trust in Him. We should remember that God will not force His plan on us; He waits patiently for our participation because He made us free. However, as long as we hold onto our own plans or securities, we do not allow God to act in our lives. He will not violate our freedom.

Read Genesis 15:1–6

12. God speaks to Abram, telling him not to fear, but Abram is still frustrated that he does not yet have an heir. So God tells Abram to go outside and count the stars, at which point Scripture says, "Abram put his faith in the Lord." Why do you think this experience was so meaningful for Abram?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

13. Now, there is a twist to this episode with Abram and God. We get an interesting piece of information just a few verses later. Could someone please read Genesis 15:12? What does this tell us about the moment when God asks Abram to go outside and count the stars?

Answer: It was daylight, so Abram couldn't see the stars.

14. With this added piece of information, what is God showing Abram?

Answer: God is showing Abram that he will have an heir, even though Abram can't see how it is possible. God is helping Abram to place his trust in Him to accomplish what seems impossible.

15. Sometimes it's difficult to let go of something, because we don't know what will happen next. Have you ever experience this before?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

16. After Abram has let Lot go, God starts to work powerfully in His life. In what ways might God be able to work in your life if you let go of your own plans?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, we learned that God made three promises to Abram, each one corresponding to the next three covenants in the story of salvation. God elevates these promises to covenants that extend to Abram's entire tribe. We also discussed Abram's battle to let go of Lot and how we need to let go of our own "Lot" in life. Finally, we discussed Abram's faithfulness, even though he couldn't see how God was going to fulfill His promises. The symbol of the stars reminds us to be faithful even when we can't see how things are going to work out.



ABRAHAM ONE TRIBE SYMBOL: STARS



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 46 - 51

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 52 - 57

Goal: That all participants would be in awe of God, recognizing the amazing way He fulfills promises through His final covenant with Abraham.



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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 16:2–4, 17:1–11, 22:1–18

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: Abraham Continued

The story of Abraham continues.

Context for Our Story Today: Taking Matters into Their Own Hands

Genesis 16:2–4

Ten years go by, and Abram still has no heir. In a moment of desperation, Sarai tells Abram to take matters into his own hands: Sarai gives her maid, Hagar, to Abram to start a line of descendants. Abram doesn't object; he sleeps with Hagar, as a kind of "surrogate mother." She conceives a son, Ishmael. This was not what God had in mind, but because this child is an offspring of Abram (and God keeps His promises), Ishmael's descendants will become an entire nation—traditionally, the Arab people.

Initially, God seems silent about Abram's behavior, but the consequences will be revealed later in the details of the narrative. Immediately after the Hagar incident, the narrative jumps 13 years—to the next time Abram hears God speak.

Genesis 17:1-11

This time, God has a different tone: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless...” (Gn 17:1). At this point, Abram reverently falls prostrate. God refers to His second promise—that He will expand His covenant so that Abram’s line will bring forth not just a nation but a royal kingdom—and He makes another covenant to prove it. At first, it may seem like Abram’s misbehavior is rewarded. But a closer look shows that, like a good father, the Lord is using this as a teaching moment for Abram.

God spells out the terms for this covenant: circumcision. It is a sign of the covenant, but it is also God’s response to Abram’s sin. Where the crime was committed, there also the punishment is given.

God also changes Abram’s name to Abraham—from “exalted father” to “father of many nations.” Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah. A change in name signifies a change in mission, and these “many nations” will be the fruit of both his sons—Ishmael and Isaac (who is not yet conceived). In other words, God will bless Abraham with descendants, but His plan includes Sarah as the mother.

Abraham and his household respond with obedience. God is faithful, and within the year, Sarah at last conceives and gives birth to Isaac—the son of the promise (Gn 21:1-3).

CLIMAX: ABRAHAM’S FINAL TEST

Genesis 22:1-18

Years pass, and God gives Abraham one final test to prove his trust in his Father’s plan. This time, God calls Abraham to take his son Isaac, heir of the promises, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. In the

past, Abraham had kept his backup plan, but here we see something different: silent obedience.

Abraham straps the wood of the offering to Isaac's back, and together, they go up the mountain. When Isaac asks his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham responds with total trust: "God will provide Himself the lamb" (Gn 22:7-8). Abraham then builds an altar and lays Isaac upon it.

Abraham then lifts the knife to slay his son—but at the last minute, an angel calls to him: "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gn 22:12). Abraham is finally willing to trust the Lord in everything. Ultimately, a ram caught in the thicket is used for the burnt offering instead of Isaac.

God tests Abraham's willingness to detach himself from his own plan. Seeing this internal change within Abraham's heart, God seals His final promise with a covenant oath: Abraham's descendants will be the means by which all the families of the earth are brought into the covenant blessing—the family of God.

APPLICATION: THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

More than just a test of wills, God the Father offers these events as a foreshadowing. As, you can see in the chart below, the near sacrifice of Isaac parallels the future sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Sacrifice of Isaac	Sacrifice of Jesus
Sacrifice to take away sins	Sacrifice to take away sins
Abraham's only son	God the Father's only Son
Rides a donkey to mountain of sacrifice	Rides a donkey into Jerusalem to die (Palm Sunday)
Isaac carries wood to the top of mountain	Jesus carries cross of wood to top of mountain
Sacrificed ram caught in thorns	Jesus crowned with thorns as He is crucified
Agrees to be sacrificed, does not resist	Agrees to be sacrificed, does not resist
Mt. Moriah outside city of Salem	Mt. Calvary (of the hills of Moriah) outside Jerusalem ("Jira"-Salem)
God will provide the lamb	Jesus is the "lamb of God"

However, not only does the sacrifice of Jesus parallel the story of Isaac, it also fulfills it.

The sacrifice of Isaac took place near the city of Salem. And, because God provided a ram for the sacrifice, Abraham called the place by that name: "So Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will provide; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided'" (Gn 22:14). But, notice that the verse reads, "shall be provided," not "was provided." Not only had God provided for Abraham, but He will provide in the future. Abraham trusted that God would provide the world-wide blessing that He promised.

Therefore, in order to remember how God would provide, the Israelites changed the name of the town of Salem: They added the prefix *Jira*, which means, "the Lord will provide." This is where we get the name Jerusalem. God's promise was so important to the Israelites that they changed the name of the city so that they would never forget it.

Now, how was God going to provide? As we read in the story, Abraham trusted that “God will provide *Himself* the lamb” (Gn 22:8, Some translations omit this phrasing. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) captures it well.). Not only was God going to one day provide a lamb, He also intended to give Himself.

In Jesus Christ, these promises reach their fulfillment. Jesus is the true lamb of God, God Himself, offered as a sacrifice for sins. What God stopped Abraham from doing to his beloved son, He would not stop from happening to *His* beloved Son. Jesus’ sacrifice happens outside the city of Jerusalem, in the exact same place as the near sacrifice of Isaac. And finally, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the promised blessing for the entire world, saving humanity from sin and death.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned that, after taking matters into his own hands and failing, Abraham finally obeys God’s command without question, agreeing to sacrifice Isaac, his son and heir. At the last minute, God intervenes and saves Isaac. He then forms a covenant with Abraham, extending it to his entire tribe. This covenant is dramatically fulfilled by Jesus Christ; He is the Lamb that God provides. The symbol of stars reminds us of how amazingly God fulfills His promises.

Special thanks to and recommendations for further reading:

Hahn, Scott: *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*. Cincinnati: Servant Books, 1998.

Gray, Tim, and Jeff Cavins: *Walking with God*. West Chester: Ascension Press, 2010.

Sri, Edward and Curtis Martin: *The Real Story*. Golden: Epic Publishing, 2012.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 16:2-4, 17:1-11, 22:1-18

OPENER:

1. Have you ever been in complete awe of something? What was it, and what made it so amazing?

(Share aloud with your group.)

Today we are going to continue with the story of Abram. When we left off, Abram was staring up at the sky, in broad daylight, hearing God say that his descendants would be like the stars. Abram believed in God. Today, we are going to look at the amazing way that God fulfills his covenant with Abram.

CONTEXT: TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

Read Genesis 16:2-4

2. What does Sarai tell Abram to do?

Answer: She tells him to sleep with her maid, Hagar, in order to start a line of descendants.

3. Abram has been walking with God for a while now. What do you think he was trying to do?

Answer: It is another instance of coming up with an alternative plan, taking matters into his own hands, instead of waiting upon the Lord to act.

Read Genesis 17:1–11

4. After Abram's disobedience, God renews His covenant with him. Does it seem to you like Abram is getting off the hook without any punishment?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

5. What does God tell Abram, now Abraham, that he must do as part of this covenant?

Answer: He and all his household must be circumcised.

6. After Abram's sin with Hagar, why is this a fitting action for this covenant?

Answer: Abram's punishment is given where the crime was committed. God wants Abraham to remember where he failed in trust, and so He gives a sign, with Abraham's own body, as a reminder that he should not repeat the same action again.

CLIMAX: ABRAHAM'S FINAL TEST

Read Genesis 22:1–18

7. What does God ask Abraham to do in this passage?

Answer: He asks Abraham to kill Isaac—to sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

8. This is dramatic. What do you think Abraham was thinking when he heard this command from God?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

9. When Isaac asks Abraham about the lamb to be sacrificed, how does Abraham respond?

Answer: Abraham says, "God will provide Himself the lamb."

10. What does this response tell us about Abraham?

Answer: An internal change has taken place within Abraham. With strengthened trust, he now fully believes that God will provide and that, somehow, He will fulfill the promises He has made.

11. After Abraham proves his trust, God makes His third and final covenant with Abraham. What does He promise?

Answer: God promises that all nations will be blessed through Abraham's line of descendants. Through Abraham's seed, the whole world will be invited into the covenant family of God.

APPLICATION: THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

(Share aloud with your group)

This is a pretty incredible story, but what is perhaps even more amazing is the way that God fulfills the promise that he makes to Abraham. Let me share with you how it happened.

More than just a test of wills, God the Father offers these events as a foreshadowing. As, you can see in the chart below, the near sacrifice of Isaac parallels the future sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Sacrifice of Isaac	Sacrifice of Jesus
Sacrifice to take away sins	Sacrifice to take away sins
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God will provide the lamb	Jesus is the "lamb of God"

However, not only does the sacrifice of Jesus parallel the story of Isaac, it also fulfills it.

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Therefore, in order to remember how God would provide, the Israelites changed the name of the town of Salem: They added the prefix *Jira*, which means, "the Lord will provide." This is where we get the name Jerusalem. God's promise was so important to the Israelites that they changed the name of the city so that they would never forget it.

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12. Looking at all of these parallels and the amazing way that God fulfills His promises, what stands out to you the most, and why?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

13. Last time we talked about our “Lot” in life, and this week we got to see the amazing way that God fulfilled His promises once Abraham was completely faithful. Have you seen God’s blessings in your life as you tried to be more faithful to Him?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, we learned that, after taking matters into his own hands and failing, Abraham finally obeys God's command without question, agreeing to sacrifice Isaac, his son and heir. At the last minute, God intervenes and saves Isaac. He then forms a covenant with Abraham, extending it to his entire tribe. This covenant is dramatically fulfilled by Jesus Christ; He is the Lamb that God provides. The symbol of stars reminds us of how amazingly God fulfills His promises.



MOSES ONE NATION SYMBOL: PASSOVER



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 60 - 65

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 66 - 71

Goal: That all participants would be inspired by God's covenant with Moses to take a stand against idolatry in their life and in the world.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Exodus 3:1–10, 3:18–20, 12:21–23, 32:1–6, 32:25–26

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: Into Slavery

Several generations have passed since the time of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac's son, Jacob (also called "Israel"), carries on the covenant blessing. After an amazing series of events, all 12 of Jacob's sons leave the Promised Land of their forefather, Abraham, and end up in Egypt. While they are there, the Egyptians turn against the Israelites and make them their slaves. Four hundred years go by, and now slavery is all the Israelites know. The land promised to their forefather Abraham is a mere memory—but God remembers His promise.

Context for Our Story Today: Moses and the Passover

Exodus 3:1–10

God appears in a burning bush to a man named Moses, telling him that he will lead God's people out of Egypt. Now, Moses is an unlikely candidate for this mission: In chapter 2 of Exodus, we learn that he is

a murderer, for one. Additionally, even after God calls him from the burning bush, Moses gives all kinds of excuses for why he can't do it. But this is part of God's plan—that even an “unfit” candidate can become a faithful leader.

Exodus 3:18–20

I'm sure you remember the story from here. God commands the Egyptians to free the Israelites, and Moses boldly proclaims to Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” But is that the whole story? Take a look at your Bible. The command that God actually gives is to let the Israelites go on a three-day journey to worship.

Why is this so important? In Exodus, the key problem is not physical slavery but spiritual slavery. While in Egypt, the Israelites have begun to worship other gods; they have forgotten God's promises. And so, by getting the Israelites out of Egypt, God is trying to get the Egyptian idolatry out of the Israelites.

When Moses finally asks Pharaoh to let the Israelites go and worship, Pharaoh refuses. It is only after this repeated refusal by Pharaoh that Moses and the Israelites must leave completely.

The Lord is zealous for His people and sends ten plagues upon the Egyptians in order to free the Israelites. Now, these plagues were not just annoying circumstances to persuade the Egyptians; the plagues were a direct assault upon Egyptian gods. For instance, the Nile River was considered a god, and when it turned to blood, it was as if God were saying, “Your god is dead; I am the true God.” And during the plague of frogs—another god to the Egyptians—they might just find one of their gods stuck to the bottom of their sandals. The final plague would test not only the Egyptians but the Israelites, as well.

Exodus 12:21–23

With the tenth and final plague, an angel of death was sent to pass through Egypt, killing all the first-born sons. However, the Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a lamb and, in a very public statement, spread the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their home. When the angel of death saw the blood of the lamb, he would pass over it, and the death of the lamb would take the place of the son.

Now, putting lamb's blood on their doorposts was more than just a strange sacrifice for the Israelites; the lamb was another Egyptian god, and to kill it was a capital offense. This was a do-or-die proposition: If the Israelites refused to sacrifice the lamb, their firstborn sons would be lost. If they *did* sacrifice the lamb, the Egyptians would come after them. It was a dramatic invitation to trust that God would be faithful. This series of events is called the Passover, and it is a sign that reminds us to sacrifice the idols in our own lives, even if doing so seems impossible or has drastic consequences.

This final plague works. The Israelites leave Egypt, crossing through the Red Sea. Shortly after the Exodus, God renews His covenant with Moses, extending it to the entire nation, the people of Israel (Ex 24:1–11).

CLIMAX: DEFIANCE IN THE DESERT

Exodus 32:1–6

In what seems to be a family tradition throughout history, almost as soon as God renews His covenant, its recipients rebel. Moses goes up the mountain to pray, and while he is gone, the Israelites get impatient. They gather around Moses' brother, Aaron, and make a request: "Make us a god who will be our leader," they ask, because "we do not know what has happened to [Moses]."

This might seem like an odd request, but even though the Israelites are now free, their hearts are still enslaved; they miss their old ways. Aaron agrees and makes a golden calf, an Egyptian fertility god. And then we read, “And the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” To “rise up to play” is a Hebrew idiom for sexual immorality. In other words, the Israelites turned their camp into a massive, idolatrous orgy.

Meanwhile, up on the mountain, Moses hears from God about Israel’s misbehavior, and the Lord sends him back to the camp to punish them (Ex 32:9–15).

APPLICATION: TAKING A STAND

Exodus 32:25–26

At the heart of idolatry is a fear that God will not satisfy us, and so we need to find satisfaction in other things. This is a temptation even after we experience God in our lives: As soon as He seems silent, prayer becomes dry, or we lose our “retreat high,” we can slip back into our old patterns of sin. But we have a responsibility to fight against idolatry, both in our own lives and in the lives of others. In Moses, we have a model of how we are to do this.

When Moses witnesses the people’s sin, he takes action immediately. He does not participate, and he doesn’t try to win the people’s favor; he simply calls them to holiness. Moses asks the entire nation of Israel, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me” (Ex 32:26). He draws a line in the sand, forcing the Israelites to make their allegiance known. Sadly, only the Levites respond (the Levites are the tribe of Levi, one of Jacob’s twelve sons generations earlier). Like Moses, we may not always get a good response, but we are still called to invite others to be holy.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, God calls Moses, an unlikely hero of faith, to lead the Israelites to freedom. This was physical freedom from slavery in Egypt, but more importantly a spiritual freedom from the worship of Egyptian gods. This happens dramatically through the Passover, a do-or-die proposition to be faithful. However, almost immediately after the Israelites are liberated and the entire nation enters into covenant with God, they become impatient and fall back into idolatry. In Moses, we have an example of how we are to call others to holiness. The Passover is the symbol for this chapter, represented by the image of a door.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Exodus 3:1-10, 3:18-20, 12:21-23, 32:1-6, 32:25-26

OPENER:

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel free to be yourself?

(Share aloud with your group.)

Today we are going to move into the second book of the Bible, Exodus, where God's people are now enslaved in Egypt. God desires to save them, but the Israelites have fallen into many pagan practices. They are physically enslaved, but also spiritually enslaved. They are not free to be the people God intends for them to be, so God calls a man named Moses to liberate them.

Context: Moses and the Passover

Read Exodus 3:1-10

2. Moses was simply doing his job, tending sheep, when he comes across a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. Not only that, but from this burning bush he receives a specific and

intense call from God. What do you think Moses is thinking right now?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

3. We don't get to read about it much here, but in chapter 2 of Exodus, we learn that Moses isn't exactly a great candidate to be God's chosen messenger—he is a murderer for, example. Have you ever felt like God was calling you to do something, but you didn't think you were good enough to do it?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

4. The rest of the story of Moses and the Exodus is probably familiar to you. When Moses goes to Pharaoh, what does he ask for the Israelite people?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. If your group answers that Moses is supposed to ask Pharaoh to let the people go, just let them run with that answer.

Read Exodus 3:18–20

5. From these verses, what does God ask Moses to say to Pharaoh?

Answer: Moses is supposed to ask Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to take a three-day pilgrimage into the wilderness so that they can worship God.

(Share aloud with your group)

This is different than what we usually hear about the Exodus, but it is really important: Even more than physical slavery, Exodus is really about spiritual slavery. (We will see this more later.) It is only after Pharaoh refuses to let the people worship that the Israelites must leave completely. After Pharaoh refuses to let them worship, God sends a series of plagues upon Egypt to persuade the Egyptians

to let the Israelites go. Now, these plagues are not just annoying circumstances; the plagues were a direct assault upon Egyptian gods. For instance, the Nile River was considered a god, and when it is turned to blood, it was as if God were saying, "Your god is dead; I am the true God." And during the plague of frogs, another Egyptian god, they might just find one of their gods stuck to the bottom of their sandals. God is trying to free His people, but He is also trying to set them free from the worship of these Egyptian gods. The final plague is a test of that faithfulness.

Read Exodus 12:21–23

6. This describes the last of the plagues God sends down on the Egyptians. Based on what we just discussed about the plagues, why do you think each family has to kill a lamb?

Answer: Sheep were worshipped as Egyptian gods. This is the Lord's way of helping the Israelites reject the idolatry of the culture that surrounded them.

7. Killing a lamb was a capital offense in Egypt, punishable by death. It was the killing of a god. Why do you think the Israelites were instructed to put the lamb's blood on their doorposts?

Answer: This would have been a very public statement, indicating that this household serves the God of Israel and does not worship the gods of Egypt. It forced the Israelites to take a side, putting their lives at stake. If their Egyptian neighbors saw this, the Israelites would likely be killed, so there was no turning back once they marked their doorposts. God was asking for total faithfulness.

8. What would happen if they didn't put the lamb's blood on the doorpost?

Answer: Their firstborn son would die.

9. This is a tough situation. Either the Egyptians will come after them or they will lose their firstborn sons. How do you think you would respond if you were an Israelite?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

CLIMAX: DEFIANCE IN THE DESERT

Read Exodus 32:1–6

10. Now that the Israelites are safely out of Egypt, Moses leaves them temporarily to go and pray. After getting impatient for his return, what do the Israelites do?

Answer: They ask Aaron to make them gods.

(Share aloud with your group)

Just to note, the phrase “rose up to play” is another Hebrew idiom. The Israelites weren't just having some fun. Bulls and calves were fertility gods in the Egyptian culture, and the worship of these gods included sexual acts. “Rose up to play” is a veiled description of an idolatrous orgy.

11. Why do you think they would ask for gods?

Answer: They got tired of waiting for the Lord and for their leader, Moses. They easily fell into their old, bad habits from their time in Egypt.

12. The Israelites are still stuck in their old, idol-worshipping ways. Our bad habits, our idols, can be difficult to give up. How can we overcome the idols in our lives?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: TAKING A STAND

Read Exodus 32:25–26

13. What does Moses do when God tells him what the Israelites are doing?

Answer: He asks those who are still faithful to the Lord to come to him.

14. When you are in a situation where other people are sinning, how can you respond faithfully?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

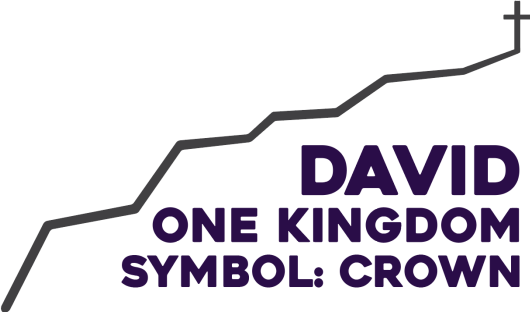
15. How might God be asking you to take a stand and call others to holiness?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, God calls Moses, an unlikely hero of faith, to lead the Israelites to freedom. This was physical freedom from slavery in Egypt, but more importantly a spiritual freedom from the worship of Egyptian gods. This happens dramatically through the Passover, a do-or-die proposition to be faithful. However, almost immediately after the Israelites are liberated and the entire nation enters into covenant with God, they become impatient and fall back into idolatry. In Moses, we have an example of how we are to call others to holiness. The Passover is the symbol for this chapter, represented by the image of a door.



DAVID ONE KINGDOM SYMBOL: CROWN



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 74 - 79

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 80 - 85

Goal: That inspired by the story of God's covenant with David, all participants would desire to repent and seek out the Sacrament of Confession.



focus
fellowship of Catholic
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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 2 Samuel 7:8–17, 11:1–15, 12:1–7, Psalm 51

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: Changes in Leadership

Moses' successor, Joshua, leads the nation of Israel into the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. After Joshua dies, a series of judges, who were military leaders, lead the nation until Samuel anoints a king for the people. God first chooses Saul and then David, his successor, as king over Israel. Through David, God again desires to renew and expand His covenant, calling him to be a great king who will restore Israel.

Context for Our Story Today: David's Virtue

In the early stories of David's life, we see great virtue: As a mere shepherd boy, he shows courage and a willingness to sacrifice his life for the kingdom when he meets Goliath. Later, Saul, the king of Israel, seeks to kill David, and yet David responds with respect for the current king. Even at the time of Saul's death, David truly mourns for his predecessor. We know David to be a man of strong virtue, a man after God's own heart.

2 Samuel 7: 8–17

Today we are going to look at some of the later episodes in David's life. In this chapter, God sends the prophet Nathan to speak to David. His words are a reminder of both David's call and God's promise: "I took you from the pasture...that you should be prince over my people Israel.... And I will make for you a great name, like the great ones of the earth.... He [David's son] shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:8, 9, 13). Hearing this, David would be thinking of the second promise made to Abraham—that of a kingly line. God also makes the incredible promise that this kingly line will never be removed; it is an unending dynasty.

CLIMAX: TROUBLE IN THE KINGDOM

2 Samuel 11:1–15

During his reign, David falls into sin. It's a gripping story: All the able men of the city are away at battle, but King David stays home. As king, he should be leading his soldiers. This is the subtle beginning of David's fall: laziness, a failure to do his duty. His idleness seems to grow: One afternoon, he rises from his couch and goes out to the roof of his palace. There, he sees a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing on her roof. He sends for her, and when she comes to him, he sleeps with her and she becomes pregnant.

David hears the news of Bathsheba's pregnancy and tries to cover up his crime: He sends for Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to come back from the battlefield for a few days, hoping that Uriah will have relations with his wife during his visit, and no one will question her pregnancy.

But Uriah is such an upright man that when he comes back to Jerusalem, he sleeps outside David's house, explaining that he cannot justify the

luxury of going home while his fellow soldiers are encamped on the battlefield. The next night, David redoubles his efforts and gets Uriah drunk. Still, Uriah refuses to go home, instead sleeping at David's doorstep.

Finally, David takes drastic and devastating measures. He sends a message to Uriah's commander, Joab, telling him to send Uriah on a suicide mission: Uriah is to be sent to the front lines, where the fighting is heaviest, and then Joab will tell the other soldiers to draw back. Joab follows the order. Uriah is killed in cold blood, and David bears the guilt.

How could a man so full of virtue fall into such disastrous sin? The answer: small steps in the wrong direction. When we find ourselves in the midst of sin, we can wonder, "How did I get here?" Almost always, it began with small steps away from God. The sooner we take responsibility for our sins, the sooner we can repent of them and be healed; conversely, the more we try and cover up our sins, the greater they become.

APPLICATION: REPENTANCE

2 Samuel 12:1-7

The Lord is very displeased: David, whom the Lord had called to be Israel's king and to lead God's children, has abandoned his duty. So God sends the prophet Nathan to deliver a message.

Nathan begins simply by telling the king a story about a beloved lamb stolen from its poor owner and fed to a rich man's guest. The lamb is an intentional symbol. Remember, David grew up as a shepherd, so he could easily place himself in this story. When David hears it, he is

enraged: He goes so far as to invoke the Lord's name and say that this man deserves death.

Then, Nathan delivers the punch: "You are that man" (2 Sam 12:7). You can see the drama of the situation: It is as if David's own words are now directed toward himself. Nathan tells David that the Lord will not abandon His covenant, but now David's line will suffer violence, oppression, and tragedy.

Psalm 51

As soon as Nathan finishes speaking, David responds, struck to the heart: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13). He doesn't try to blame someone else, as many of his forefathers did. When confronted with his sin, he simply admits it. This was the moment that inspired David to write the beautiful Psalm 51—his cry for God's mercy, and a great example of authentic repentance.

The words of Psalm 51 give us a great starting point for finding the words to repent: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:1-2).

Confession is a great opportunity to admit our guilt and confess our sins to God. In this sacrament, we receive God's forgiveness, our consciences are unburdened, and we are given the grace to heal.

SUMMARY

In the story of David, we see the terrible fall of a good man. God makes His covenant with David, extending it to the entire kingdom. But David starts neglecting his duty and eventually falls into one serious sin after another. The Lord uses the prophet Nathan and a compelling story to reveal to David his own guilt. David responds with authentic and heartfelt repentance. Like David, we too should repent from the heart, taking advantage of the sacrament of confession to draw closer to God. The symbol of the crown is a reminder of David's kingship and how we should repent when we sin.

Note to the Leader: This is a good opportunity to recommend the sacrament of confession to your group. As the leader, you may need to teach the participants how to make a good confession. Help them find the right time and place for confession, perhaps even setting up arrangements with a priest. Don't let logistical difficulties prevent them from receiving the sacrament; give them encouragement and assure them of the incredible benefits of a good confession. Also, lead by example: Share with your group your own need for confession. Be vulnerable and go to confession yourself, especially if you have serious sins to confess.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

2 Samuel 7:8-17, 11:1-15, 12:1-7, Psalm 51

OPENER:

1. Have you ever been caught doing something you shouldn't have been doing?

(Share aloud with your group)

Today we are going to read about David. In him, we see a man of virtue with whom God makes his covenant. David receives the amazing promise that his descendants will be an unending line of kings. We will also see David make a series of terrible mistakes, but through them, we will learn how we can respond when we fail.

CONTEXT: DAVID'S VIRTUE

2. We can learn so much about David from the stories in the Bible of his early life: We learn that he trusts God's faithfulness and that he has courage when he meets Goliath. We also learn that David is merciful when he refuses to kill King Saul, even though Saul is trying to kill him. With the information from these stories

and any others that you know, what kind of man do you think David was?

Answer: We know that he was a man of virtue and close to the heart of God.

Read 2 Samuel 7:8–17

3. Here, as the Lord is establishing His next covenant with David, He recounts the works He has done for David and for Israel. What sticks out to you?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

4. Thinking back to previous chapters and the three promises God made to Abraham, which one is God setting out to fulfill with David?

Answer: To Abraham, God promised: (1) land, (2) a kingdom, and (3) worldwide blessing. Here, God is establishing a kingly line—the second promise.

CLIMAX: TROUBLE IN THE KINGDOM

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–15

5. The first three sentences of this chapter give us a picture of David's activities. What is he doing, and what *should* he be doing?

Answer: He is resting in Jerusalem when he should be leading his men on the battlefield.

6. What does David do next?

Answer: He sees Bathsheba while she is bathing, invites her to the palace, and sleeps with her, after which she becomes pregnant.

7. When David finds out Bathsheba is pregnant, what do you think he is most concerned about?

Answer: He seems most concerned about his own reputation and concealing his guilt.

8. How does David attempt to conceal his sin?

Answer: He has Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, brought home from the battlefield, hoping he will sleep with Bathsheba and provide an explanation for her pregnancy. When Uriah refuses to go sleep at his own home, David ensures he is killed on the battlefield—a premeditated murder, in cold blood.

9. This is a terrible sin. But, like David, our small sins can lead to bigger ones, especially when we try to cover them up. Can you relate to David in this situation?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: REPENTANCE

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7

10. In this passage, the prophet Nathan confronts David in a powerful way. What does he do?

Answer: Nathan tells a story to help David recognize the gravity of what he has done.

11. Why do you think this story was so effective in leading David to repentance?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. This story has particular significance for David because it was about a lamb, and David is a former shepherd. David would have loved and cared for many lambs in his younger life.

12. We've read many stories in this Bible study. How have these stories helped you live faithfully?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

13. Typically, what is your first reaction when confronted with your sins?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

14. Nathan helps David turn back to God. Do you have anyone in your life who can help when you are struggling to follow God faithfully?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

Take a minute to read or pray with Psalm 51

15. Psalm 51 was written by David after Nathan confronts him with his sins. What stood out to you in these verses?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

16. Confession is a great opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness. I want to invite each of you to go to confession this week. Is there anything I can do to help you prepare to go to confession?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the Leader: As the leader, you may need to teach the participants how to make a good confession. Help them find the right time and place for confession, perhaps even setting up arrangements with a priest. Don't let logistical difficulties prevent them from receiving the sacrament; give them encouragement and assure them of the incredible benefits of a good confession. Also, lead by example: Share with your group your own need for confession. Be vulnerable and go to confession yourself, especially if you have serious sins to confess.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In the story of David, we see the terrible fall of a good man. God makes His covenant with David, extending it to the entire kingdom. But David starts neglecting his duty and eventually falls into one serious sin after another. The Lord uses the prophet Nathan and a compelling story to reveal to David his own guilt. David responds with authentic and heartfelt repentance. Like David, we too should repent from the heart, taking advantage of the sacrament of confession to draw closer to God. The symbol of the crown is a reminder of David's kingship and how we should repent when we sin.



JESUS ONE CHURCH SYMBOL: EUCHARIST



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

Page 88 - 95

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Page 96 - 103

Goal: That all participants would understand how Jesus fulfills all the covenants and that they reaffirm their decision to live in covenant relationship with Jesus, particularly in the Eucharist.

Also, complete the overall goals for the study: 1) That all participants know all 6 covenants and 2) That all participants know their place in God's plan.

Note to the Leader: This chapter may take more than one week to complete. Please plan and prepare accordingly.



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Luke 22:14–20; 22:39–46; 23:33–49

CONTEXT

In the Context of the Story of Salvation: The Coming Messiah

After David, the Kingdom of Israel was torn in two by civil war. The Northern Kingdom consisted of the ten tribes of Israel; the Southern Kingdom was populated by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Both kingdoms would eventually be conquered and taken into exile—the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians. The ten northern tribes would never return to their homeland: They assimilated into Assyria and are known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. The Southern Kingdom, commonly known as the Jews, would eventually return from exile, but they would remain under the authority of the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans.

Through it all, prophet after prophet reminds the people that God has not abandoned them. An anointed one—a messiah king—will come to restore the covenant and set them free.

Then, in the fullness of time, God sends His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to establish one final covenant in order to bring the whole world back into covenant relationship with God.


In the Context of Our Story Today: The Passion

Luke 22:14–20; 22:39–46; 23:33–49

During Jesus' life and ministry, we see how He fulfills the promises of the Old Testament and expands God's covenant to all nations. Take some time to read the above passages from Luke's Gospel. You'll read about Jesus' establishment of a new covenant with the Eucharist during the Passover. You'll be by Jesus' side during the agony in the garden as you contemplate the suffering set before Him. You'll walk with Him as He journeys towards His death on the cross.

REVIEW

But, before we explore the ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament covenants, this is a good opportunity to test your memory of the major covenants in the story of salvation. Fill in the chart below (we've already filled in the information about the sixth covenant as an example).

	1 ST COVENANT	2 ND COVENANT	3 RD COVENANT	4 TH COVENANT	5 TH COVENANT	6 TH COVENANT
PERSON:						JESUS
FORM:						ONE CHURCH
SYMBOL: (BONUS)						

CLIMAX: COVENANTS FULFILLED

After the resurrection, Jesus meets two people along the road to Emmaus. They are discussing all they've seen over the last few days and how they "had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 22:21). Jesus then spends the rest of their journey walking with them and explaining to them how the Christ had to suffer and die in order to fulfill the Scriptures. Let's look back at each of the five covenants in the Old Testament to understand how Jesus does this.

Adam: The first covenant with Adam is broken when he falls into the devil's temptation in the garden. Jesus, too, is tempted by the devil in a garden, but where Adam is unfaithful, Jesus shows that He is the faithful Son (Lk 22:39-46). Jesus takes on Adam's covenant curses of sweat, thorns, and death (Gn 3:18-19) when He sweats blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, is crowned with thorns by the Roman soldiers, and dies on the cross at Calvary.

Noah: Through Noah, God chooses to make His covenant with one who is faithful in the midst of a corrupted world. Noah's obedience gives rise to an ark, through which his household is spared. Like Noah, Jesus offers salvation to the human family through the waters of baptism, by which we pass through the waters of death and emerge in the newness of life with Christ: "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through the water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.... It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 3:20-21).

Abraham: Like Isaac, Jesus is the "beloved Son of the Father," but while God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac in atonement for sins, He does not stop His own Son from being sacrificed for the sins of the world (Lk 23:33-49). (See Chapter 4 for a chart of other similarities.)

In Jesus, the third promise to Abraham, that of worldwide blessing, is finally fulfilled. He establishes the Catholic Church (which means “universal” or “worldwide”), which opens its arms to the whole world.

Moses: With Moses, God initiates His covenant through the Passover meal the night before they are freed from slavery. Jesus also establishes the new covenant at the Passover (Lk 22:14-20). He is the unblemished lamb of sacrifice—the Lamb of God. Just as with the Israelites, the Passover is not just a sacrifice but a meal wherein one had to eat the flesh of the lamb; so too with Jesus. He offers His flesh and blood to nourish our souls in the Eucharist. Through this sacrament, we renew our participation in the new and everlasting covenant.

David: Finally, Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection reveal that He is the long-awaited Davidic king promised by the covenant who establishes His royal throne upon the cross. What was meant to be a mockery is the source of our salvation: They scourge Him and robe Him in purple, they crown Him with thorns and pretend to pay homage to Him as royalty, but His enthronement is a cross of wood (Lk 23:36). Finally, they hang the sign that unintentionally reveals His Davidic kingship: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” It is the good thief, crucified next to Him, who proclaims his own belief in Jesus’ kingship: “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom” (Lk 23:36–43).

What looks like God’s greatest defeat is, in fact, the greatest victory. The cross is our final freedom from the bondage of sin and death. The debt we owed in neglecting the covenant is paid by the Son, who is faithful. In Jesus, we now have the opportunity to become adopted sons and daughters within the Father’s household.

APPLICATION: ENTERING THE COVENANT

As we have seen, all the covenants reach fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But the story of salvation doesn't end there: Each of us is called to enter into a covenant relationship with Jesus, to receive the promises of God and promise our fidelity to Him.

The Eucharist is the sign of this new and everlasting covenant: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'" (Lk 22:19–20). In the Eucharist, we recommit ourselves to living in a deep, personal covenant with God.

As members of the Church, we are participants in the new covenant. God has given us everything—His only son, and the promise of our every happiness. We can live as sons and daughters, accepting God's amazing promises and entering into covenant relationship with Him, or we can refuse. The story of salvation is not a thing of the past, but something that we are in the midst of right now. How will we respond?

When we receive Holy Communion, we hear the words, "Body of Christ." We then say, "Amen." The word "Amen" signifies affirmation or agreement. In other words, it is a promise. As you may remember from the introduction, a covenant is an exchange of persons, wherein those who were not family become family. A covenant is sealed with an oath. By saying, "Amen," we are renewing the covenant made at our baptism, promising once again to be faithful. The next time you go to Mass, take seriously the promise you are making, and strive to give yourself to Jesus completely.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned how Jesus Christ fulfills all the covenants of the Old Testament. We also learned how we are called to enter into covenant relationship with Jesus Christ within the Catholic Church, the worldwide covenant community. In the Eucharist, we renew our pledge to be faithful: Jesus gives Himself to us completely, and we promise to give ourselves back to Him completely. The Eucharist is also the sign and symbol of this new and everlasting covenant.

Note to the Leader: If any of your Bible study members have not yet received a gospel presentation, this is a good opportunity to meet with them individually and, after the completion of the study, offer them the chance to make a decision about living in a faithful covenant relationship with God, in Jesus Christ.

The Ultimate Relationship is a helpful tool when presenting the gospel. You may also use an appropriate passage of Scripture, such as the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Luke 22:14–20; 22:39–46; 23:33–49

OPENER:

1. Have you ever had to wait for something really amazing?

(Share aloud with your group)

Today we are going to do things a little differently. First, we are going to take a minute to read a few passages about Jesus' passion and death. Second, we will review the covenants of the Old Testament. Next, we will see how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament covenants. Then finally, we will talk about our place in God's covenant as His sons and daughters. Also, there is quite a bit here, so we might not get all of it completed this week.

CONTEXT: THE PASSION

Read Luke 22:14–20

2. What stands out to you about what Jesus says and does in this passage?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

3. How does Jesus set the stage for the establishment of the new covenant in this passage?

Answer: Within the context of the Passover meal, He tells them that His body and blood, about to be sacrificed, will be the source of the new covenant.

4. In the story of salvation, with each new covenant there is an increase in scope—from Adam and Eve and a single couple to David and an entire kingdom. In Jesus Christ, the covenant extends to the whole world. This is where we get the term “Catholic”: It means “universal” or “worldwide.” The Catholic Church is the worldwide covenant community. Does this change the way you see the Church?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

5. It is not uncommon for members of the Church to fail in faithfully living out its mission to bring people into the covenant. What can we do to more effectively bring others into the Church?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

Read Christ’s Passion account in Luke 22:39–46 and Luke 23:33–49.

6. In light of what you’ve learned in this study, did anything strike you that you never noticed before?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Don’t worry if they don’t have a lot to say; you are going fill in some details in the following section.

REVIEW

7. Now that we have read about the Last Supper, passion, and death of Jesus, we are going to explore the ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament covenants. Before we can do this, let's see if we can remember all of the covenants—the person God made them with, the recipients of the covenant, and the symbol for each one.

Note to the leader: Hand out the Covenant Worksheet to all of your participants and take some time to fill it out. If you did not make copies in advance, fill it out together.

Note to the leader: In the following section, you will read aloud how Jesus fulfills each of the previous covenants. You may discuss each covenant separately or all together at the end.

CLIMAX: COVENANTS FULFILLED

(Share aloud with your group)

Here is brief description of how Jesus fulfills each of the previous covenants.

Adam: The first covenant with Adam is broken when he falls into the devil's temptation in the garden. Jesus, too, is tempted by the devil in a garden, but where Adam is unfaithful, Jesus shows that He is the faithful Son (Lk 22:39–46). Jesus takes on Adam's covenant curses of sweat, thorns, and death (Gn 3:18–19) when He sweats blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, is crowned with thorns by the Roman soldiers, and dies on the cross at Calvary.

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Moses: With Moses, God initiates His covenant through the Passover meal the night before they are freed from slavery. Jesus also establishes the new covenant at the Passover (Lk 22:14-20). He is the unblemished lamb of sacrifice—the Lamb of God. Just as with the Israelites, the Passover is not just a sacrifice but a meal wherein one had to eat the flesh of the lamb; so too with Jesus. He offers His flesh and blood to nourish our souls in the Eucharist. Through this sacrament, we renew our participation in the new and everlasting covenant.

David: Finally, Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection reveal that He is the long-awaited Davidic king promised by the covenant who establishes His royal throne upon the cross. What was meant to

be a mockery is the source of our salvation: They scourge Him and robe Him in purple, they crown Him with thorns and pretend to pay homage to Him as royalty, but His enthronement is a cross of wood (Lk 23:36). Finally, they hang the sign that unintentionally reveals His Davidic kingship: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” It is the good thief, crucified next to Him, who proclaims his own belief in Jesus’ kingship: “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom” (Lk 23:36–43).

What looks like God’s greatest defeat is, in fact, the greatest victory. The cross is our final freedom from the bondage of sin and death. The debt we owed in neglecting the covenant is paid by the Son, who is faithful. In Jesus, we now have the opportunity to become adopted sons and daughters within the Father’s household.

8. What stood out to you as you heard how Jesus fulfilled these covenants?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

9. When you understand these similarities—viewing the New Testament in light of the Old—does it change the way you view Jesus?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: ENTERING THE COVENANT

10. We’ve been discussing the last covenant, established in Jesus Christ, which fulfills all the others. As we saw, the scope of each successive covenant becomes larger and larger. Who is invited into this new and final covenant?

Answer: Everyone.

11. Have you ever thought of yourself as being in a covenant relationship with God? What does that mean?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. It means that we have become beloved sons and daughters of God, members of His family, the Church, inheritors of His promises and all the blessings it entails. It also means that we ought to be faithful to that covenant.

12. The Eucharist is the sign of the new covenant. When we receive Holy Communion, we hear the words, "Body of Christ." We then say, "Amen." The word "amen" signifies affirmation or agreement. In other words, it is a promise. As you may remember from the introduction, a covenant is an exchange of persons, sealed with an oath, wherein those who were not family become family. By saying "amen," we are renewing the covenant, promising once again to be faithful. How does receiving the Eucharist renew our covenant relationship with Jesus Christ?

Answer: In the Eucharist, Jesus gives Himself to us completely, and we, in turn, give ourselves completely back to Him. We are invited into His sacrifice and receive the grace to be more faithful to Him. By receiving Him in Holy Communion, we promise our fidelity.

13. Does this understanding of the Eucharist as a covenant sign change the way you think about Mass?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

14. What can we do to receive the Eucharist more faithfully?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

15. We are now at the end of our study. Compare your life now to where you were at the beginning of the study. What is different?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group)

In this chapter, we learned how Jesus Christ fulfills all the covenants of the Old Testament. We also learned how we are called to enter into covenant relationship with Jesus Christ within the Catholic Church, the worldwide covenant community. In the Eucharist, we renew our pledge to be faithful: Jesus gives Himself to us completely, and we promise to give ourselves back to Him completely. The Eucharist is also the sign and symbol of this new and everlasting covenant.

Note to the leader: If any of your Bible study members have not yet received a gospel presentation, this is a good opportunity to meet with them individually and, after the completion of the study, offer them the chance to make a decision about living in a faithful covenant relationship with God, in Jesus Christ.


The Ultimate Relationship is a helpful tool when presenting the Gospel. You may also use an appropriate passage of Scripture, such as the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32.



THE STORY OF SALVATION

COVENANT WORKSHEET

Directions: See if you can name each of the covenants in order:

	1 ST COVENANT	2 ND COVENANT	3 RD COVENANT	4 TH COVENANT	5 TH COVENANT	6 TH COVENANT
PERSON:						JESUS
FORM:						ONE CHURCH
SYMBOL: (BONUS)						

FOCUS Equip

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THE STORY OF SALVATION



ADAM



NOAH



ABRAHAM



MOSES



DAVID



JESUS



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