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## Chapter IV

# The Covenant Family of God

### UNDERSTANDING

*(for your preparation as a leader)*

Pages 76 - 89

### DISCUSSION

*(to use with your group)*

Pages 90 - 104

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

## One Key Word

The night before he died, Jesus had one last meal with his disciples. At this “Last Supper,” he took a chalice, and giving thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it,  
For this is the chalice of my blood,  
The blood of the new and eternal covenant,  
Which will be poured out for you and for many for the  
forgiveness of sins.  
Do this in memory of me.

These words are especially familiar to Catholics, who hear them spoken by the priest at every Mass. But what if you had never heard these words before? What if you were one of Jesus’ disciples who were hearing these words spoken by Jesus for the very first time — what would they have meant to you?

One key word that likely would have stood out to you the most was the word “covenant.” Covenant is one of the most important concepts in the Bible. It serves as a central theme which unites the whole story

of God's plan of salvation, for it describes the profound union God establishes with his people. God doesn't just have a general friendship with his people; he has a covenant union with them. This is what makes Jesus' move to wait until the Last Supper to use this crucial word so surprising. Indeed, this key Biblical word, used over 250 times in the Jewish Scriptures, is astonishingly never used by Jesus in his public ministry. He uses this word only once, and he waits for the climactic moment the night before he's crucified, right here at the Last Supper. That tells us he must have something very important in mind when he speaks about his imminent death and his blood being shed as "the blood of the new and everlasting covenant."

To appreciate what Jesus is doing in his Last Supper, Passion and Death, we must first make sure we understand what a covenant is.

### **What is a Covenant?**

The English word "covenant" is derived from the Latin word *convenire*, which means to come together, unite or agree. At a most basic level, a Biblical covenant is a solemn pact between two or more parties, but it's much more profound than a mere contract. A modern contract involves an exchange of goods and services, whereas a Biblical covenant is an exchange of persons. In a contract, two parties might say, "I'll do this for you if you do this for me." But in a covenant, like in the covenant of marriage, the two people say, "I am yours and you are mine... I give myself to you and I accept you completely, unconditionally."

A contract is temporary and conditional: if one side breaks the contract, the other side can terminate the relationship. A covenant, however, is permanent, lasting for the rest of one's life — as is

expressed in a wedding ceremony: “I will love you and honor you *all the days of my life*.” While a contract is a 50/50 relationship — “I’ll do this for you as long as you do this for me” — a covenant is 100/100; and if one person does not fulfill their end of the relationship, the other person makes up for what the other lacks.

### **Covenants Form Family Bonds**

One of the most important aspects of Biblical covenants is that they *forge family bonds*. When covenants are made between former enemies, they call themselves brothers (Amos 1:9; 1 Kings 9:13; cf. Genesis 26:31). When God makes a covenant with his people, he calls them his “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22) and even his bride (Ephesians 5:21-33, Isaiah 62:5, Hosea 11:1). The family language highlights how much God wants to be united to his people. He adopts us as his children and invites us to share in his very life in his one covenant family.

So when Jesus says at the Last Supper that his death on the cross — the pouring out of his blood on Calvary — will bring about a new and everlasting covenant, he’s saying a lot. He’s announcing that there’s a new covenant bond being established between God and humanity, one that’s forged with his bloody sacrifice on the Cross.

### **What Kind of Family?**

Since Jesus is establishing a new covenant with humanity, and covenants form family bonds, it’s no surprise that Jesus uses family language to describe his disciples (e.g. Matthew 13:55). Jesus, the Eternal, All-Holy Son of God, calls his followers his brothers and

sisters. People who were great sinners are now brothers and sisters with the Son of God. Amazing! Moreover, Jesus summons them to call His Heavenly Father their own Father. When he teaches them to pray, he tells them to address God as “Our Father.” As we saw in the last chapter, Jesus is gathering a supernatural family of disciples who share in his very life.

But what kind of family is Jesus establishing? In his preaching, Jesus makes clear it is a *royal* family. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God, which for the Jews in the first century was not something up in the clouds or merely in some distant afterlife. For the Jews in Jesus’ day, the Kingdom of God was expected to come in the here and now. It had been entrusted in the hands of men, first in one of their great heroes King David and then passed on to his royal heirs to the throne throughout the centuries (2 Chronicles 13:8).

To appreciate the Kingdom that Jesus proclaims, we need to understand a bit about the hopes surrounding the Davidic kingdom of old that Jesus is bringing to fulfillment in his ministry. Let’s, therefore, step back for a moment and briefly consider three key features of the Davidic kingdom which began about 1,000 years before Christ (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

- *Prime Minister:* The Davidic Kings had a steward, or in Hebrew, an *'al habbayit* (literally, the one “over the house”) who was in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom and who ruled the kingdom whenever the king was away. He was not the king, but the *'al habbayit* was given authority from the king to manage the kingdom on his behalf (Isaiah 22:20-21). The *'al habbayit* was described as a father to the citizens of the kingdom (Isaiah 22:21), and a sign of his authority was the keys of the kingdom given to him by the king (Isaiah 22:22).

- *Queen Mother:* The Davidic kings also had a Queen Mother assisting in their reign. While the kings in the ancient near-eastern world each often had many wives, each king had only one mother; so the queenship was given to her. In the Davidic kingdom, the Queen Mother held an official position of authority in the kingdom (2 Kings 24), shared in the king's shepherding of the people (Jeremiah 13:18), served as a counselor to her royal son (Proverbs 31), and most of all, was a powerful intercessor for the people, bringing petitions from the citizens of the kingdom to her royal son (1 Kings 2:13-20).
- *A New Liturgy and a Reorganized Priesthood:* Long before David's time, the ancient Israelites had had a priesthood consisting of members from the tribe of Levi. But when David establishes Jerusalem as his capital, he makes it the center for worship by bringing the most sacred vessel in all of Israel — the Ark of the Covenant — to the city. There, David reorganizes the priesthood around a new liturgy that involves the Levites invoking, thanking and praising the Lord before God's holy presence over the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 16:4-7). They sing hymns known as the Psalms, many of which were written by David himself (1 Chronicles 16:8-36). And they continually offer worship to God before the Ark every morning and evening — which was the first Biblical form of perpetual adoration (1 Chronicles 16:37, 40-41). David also reorganizes the priesthood for these new duties of perpetual adoration. He organizes them into 24 different groups, each taking turns to do different duties for serving in worship (1 Chronicles 24:1-18). Which priest did which duty was determined by *casting lots* (1 Chronicles 24:5, 31). For the pagans, casting lots was simply a random game of chance (as we see with the Roman soldiers casting

lots for Jesus' garments at Calvary – see John 19:24). But for the Jews, the practice of casting lots was different. It was sacred. Casting lots was a way to discern God's will, *especially as it related to priestly duties*. The Jews believed that casting lots revealed God's choice for which priest should perform which role in worship each day (1 Chronicles 24:31; Luke 1:8-9). That's why lots were cast in the presence of the king to determine which priest would do which duty for worship in the Jerusalem sanctuary.

This background will be important for understanding the kingdom Jesus announces and invites us to in his public ministry.

### **The Return of the King**

The Jews in Jesus' day had been longing for the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. For centuries, no Davidic king had sat on the throne as God's people had been oppressed by one foreign nation after another. Rome was the latest empire to rule over them, and the Jews were longing to be liberated from harsh Roman taxes and domination. The ancient Jewish prophets had foretold that, one day, God would rescue his people. He would send a new royal son of David to be anointed as king. This king would be called the *messiah*, the Hebrew word meaning "anointed one". The messiah-king would drive the enemies off the land, restore the Davidic Kingdom to its former glory and extend its reign to the ends of the earth.

So when Jesus comes onto the stage as the new "son of David," the rightful heir to the throne (Matthew 1:1-17) and begins his public ministry announcing that the Kingdom of God is at hand, it's no wonder that such excitement grew around Jesus' movement, and large crowds

come from all over to hear what he has to say (Matthew 4:23-25). The new Davidic kingdom which they had been longing for centuries was now coming to fulfillment in Jesus!

### *The 'al habbayit*

Just like the Davidic kings of old, Jesus has close associates who participate in his mission. If Jesus is announcing a kingdom, we should expect that he would have a steward, a right-hand man, vested with his authority, an *'al habbayit*, like they did. That's what we should expect if we understand Jesus within the Biblical lens of the ancient Jews. And, indeed, that's exactly what we find. In a dramatic turning point in his ministry, Jesus tells his apostle Peter he will give him "the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19) — which we have seen is the Biblical symbol for the office of the *'al habbayit* (Isaiah 22:22). In giving Peter "the keys of the kingdom" Jesus is establishing Peter as the steward of his kingdom, the one in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom, especially when the King, Jesus, goes away — when he rises from the dead and ascends into heaven. It will be Peter who will be the rock of the Church Jesus is building (Matthew 16:18). Just as the *'al habbayit* of old held an office, with successors who have real authority, so Peter is given this office of leadership in Christ's kingdom, and he is the first of many successors, all the way down to the current person holding this office, the pope today. And just as the *'al habbayit* was called a "father" to the citizens of the kingdom, so we call Peter's successor "Pope," which means "papa." Indeed, the Pope is rightly called "Holy Father" by Catholics, because the Pope is our spiritual father representing Christ the King to us today.

### *Queen Mother*

And just as the Davidic kings of old had their mothers reign as Queen Mother, so Jesus' mother, Mary, serves in that role. Again, this is just following the basic Biblical logic: if Jesus is the King and Mary is Jesus'



mother, then Mary should be seen as the Queen Mother. That's why Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, describes Mary with the royal title "Mother of My Lord" — a reference to Mary as the mother of the king, i.e., the Queen Mother (Luke 1:43). And that's why Mary appears in the Book of Revelation, in chapter 12, as the mother of the king (Revelation 12:5) who is decked in royal splendor, including a crown of 12 stars on her head — symbolizing the twelve Apostles upon which Christ's Church is built (Revelation 12:1-2). And since the queen mothers of old served as advocates for the people, it's fitting that Mary, our Queen Mother, plays the same role. She is our advocate. Just as the citizens of the kingdom brought their petitions to the queen mother, and the Queen Mother presented those petitions to her royal son, so Mary intercedes for us, lovingly praying for all our needs. And the prayers of her mother's heart are powerful. When she intercedes, it's as if Jesus says to her what the King said to the Queen Mother Bathsheba: "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you" (1 Kings 2:20).

### *Priesthood for a New Liturgy*

Now we return to the Last Supper. Just like David established a new worship, centered on singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God, so Jesus establishes a new worship centered on him. At this meal he offers his body and blood like a lamb being offered up in sacrifice. He says, "this is my body which is offered up for you.... this is my blood, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus uses technical language from the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple to describe the animal's body being offered up in sacrifice and its blood being poured out on the altar for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus clearly views his body and blood as some kind of new sacrifice — it will be his body offered up on the cross and his blood being poured out on Calvary that will be the center of the new worship. And he invites us to enter this perfect, sacrificial love of Christ every

time we partake of his body and blood in the Eucharist. Indeed, the Eucharist that Jesus instituted at the Last Supper is the center of Christian worship, and we partake in this every time we go to Mass.

*Priesthood for a New Liturgy*

Similar to David, Jesus organizes a new priesthood to serve this new liturgy of the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, he establishes the twelve Apostles as priests, commanding them to continue celebrating the Eucharist, making present the gift of his body and blood for generations to come. He says to them, "Do this as a memorial of me." Priests offer sacrifice, and that's what Jesus commands the Apostles to do: make present the sacrifice of his body and blood so that all peoples might enter into this perfect gift of his love on the Cross. But it's not just at the Last Supper that we see the Apostles being called to serve as priests. After Jesus ascends into heaven, the Apostles had to decide how to replace Judas, the one who betrayed Christ and then killed himself. The Apostles knew they had a responsibility to find a successor to step into this office, which was meant to be passed on from one person to the next throughout the ages. And the way they decided who would fill this spot of Judas was to *cast lots* (Acts 1:21-26). Remember, for the Jews, casting lots was not a game of chance. It was a way to discern God's will about priestly duties. The fact that the Apostles cast lots points to how they understood the important office they were needing to fill: the office of the new priesthood.

*Conclusion: All in the Family*

The Kingdom. The Son of David. The *'al habbayit*. The Queen Mother. The New Liturgy and the New Priesthood. These are just some of the essential parts of the royal covenant family Jesus is inviting us all to enter. And remember, this kingdom is not just for the Jewish people; it's for all humanity. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 3, Jesus doesn't come

to save us individually, isolated from each other. He comes to unite us together, to heal the broken, divided human family and reunite us in the one, royal covenant family of God, the Catholic Church. In the Church, you and I are not just friends. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. And because of the life of Christ dwelling in all of us, we can truly call God our Father, Mary our mother and our *'al habbayit* (the pope) Holy Father. True followers of Jesus gather together to worship God in the new liturgy of the Eucharist, led by the members of the new priesthood who make Christ's gift of his body and blood in the Eucharist present for us to be united with Our Lord in Holy Communion at Mass. Saying "Yes" to Jesus involves saying "Yes" to all that he reveals to us and offers us through his Church. We can't love the King but reject his Kingdom. We can't fully accept Christ but reject His Church.

## **MORE BACKGROUND: KEY CONCEPTS**

### **Church (CCC 763-766):**

It was the Son's task to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent. "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures." To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."

"This Kingdom shines out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ." To welcome Jesus' word is to welcome "the Kingdom itself." The seed and beginning of the Kingdom are the "little flock" of those whom Jesus came to gather around him, the flock

whose shepherd he is. They form Jesus' true family. To those whom he thus gathered around him, he taught a new "way of acting" and a prayer of their own.

The Lord Jesus endowed his community with a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved. Before all else there is the choice of the Twelve with Peter as their head. Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem. The Twelve and the other disciples share in Christ's mission and his power, but also in his lot. By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church.

The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. "The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus." "For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the 'wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.'" As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross.

**The Pope (CCC 881-882):**

The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head." This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."

**Mary (CCC 495):**

Called in the Gospels "the mother of Jesus", Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as "the mother of my Lord". In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly "Mother of God" (Theotokos).

**Eucharist (CCC 1324-27):**

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

"The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit."

Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all.

In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.”

**Priesthood (CCC 1562-1563, 1566):**

“Christ, whom the Father hallowed and sent into the world, has, through his apostles, made their successors, the bishops namely, sharers in his consecration and mission; and these, in their turn, duly entrusted in varying degrees various members of the Church with the office of their ministry.” “The function of the bishops’ ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of the priesthood and be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the apostolic mission that had been entrusted to it by Christ.”

“Because it is joined with the episcopal order the office of priests shares in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his Body. Hence the priesthood of priests, while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is nevertheless conferred by its own particular sacrament. Through that sacrament priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head.”

“It is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful (synaxis) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred office; there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the New Testament, that namely of Christ offering himself once for all a

spotless victim to the Father.” From this unique sacrifice their whole priestly ministry draws its strength.

**Liturgy (CCC 1069-1070):**

The word “liturgy” originally meant a “public work” or a “service in the name of/on behalf of the people.” In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in “the work of God.” Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church.

In the New Testament the word “liturgy” refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity. In all of these situations it is a question of the service of God and neighbor. In a liturgical celebration the Church is servant in the image of her Lord, the one “leitourgos”; she shares in Christ’s priesthood (worship), which is both prophetic (proclamation) and kingly (service of charity):

The liturgy then is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. It involves the presentation of man’s sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members. From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of his Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Passages: Luke 22:19-20, Isaiah 22:21-24, Matthew 16:17-19, 1 Kings 2:13-20, Revelation 12:1-2, 1 Chronicles 24:1-5, 1 Chronicles 24:31, Acts 1:21-26*

## Introduction

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

The night before he died, Jesus had one last meal with his disciples. At this “Last Supper,” he took a chalice, and giving thanks, he said the blessing, and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it,  
For this is the chalice of my blood,  
The blood of the new and eternal covenant,  
Which will be poured out for you and for many for the  
forgiveness of sins.  
Do this in memory of me.

These words are especially familiar to Catholics, who hear them spoken by the priest at every Mass. But what if you had never heard these words before? What if you were one of Jesus’ disciples who were hearing these words spoken for the very first time—what would



they have meant to you?

1. Launching Question: Which one of these words do you think stood out the most to the apostles at the Last Supper?

*Allow the group to discuss. Answer: The words chalice, blood and forgiveness of sins would bring to mind sacrifices in the temple. But the key word that would have stood out the most was the word "covenant." Covenant is one of the most important concepts in the Bible, used over 250 times in the Jewish Scriptures, and serving as a central theme uniting the whole story of God's plan of salvation.*

2. What comes to mind when you hear the word "covenant"? What do you think it means? How might a covenant be similar or different to a modern-day contract?

*Allow the group to discuss. Answer: The word covenant is derived from the Latin word convenire, which means to come together, unite or agree. At a most basic level, a Biblical covenant is a solemn pact between two or more parties, but it's much more profound than a mere contract. A modern contract involves an exchange of goods and services; whereas a Biblical covenant is an exchange of persons. In a contract, two parties might say, "I'll do this for you if you do this for me." But in a covenant, like in the covenant of marriage, the two people say, "I am yours and you are mine...I give myself to you and I accept you completely, unconditionally."*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

There is one very important additional aspect that we need to know about covenants, and that is that covenants form family bonds. In the

ancient Biblical world, when two families, nations or individuals made a covenant together, they often used family imagery to describe the new relationship: brother/sister, father/son, or husband/wife. Similarly, when God makes a covenant with his people Israel, he calls them his son (Exodus 4:22), his brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:50) and even his bride (Ephesians 5:21-33, Isaiah 62:5, Hosea 11:1)

So when Jesus at the Last Supper announces that he is establishing “a new and eternal covenant” with his people, he is saying a lot. He is uniting himself to us in a most profound relationship in which we become part of his family.

3. Have you ever thought of being a part of God’s family? What impact does this have on the way we view our relationship with God?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

But what kind of family is this? In his preaching, Jesus makes clear it is a *royal* family. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God, which for the Jews in the first century would bring to mind the Kingdom God entrusted into to one of their great heroes, King David, and then passed on to his royal heirs throughout the centuries (2 Chronicles 13:8).

To appreciate the Kingdom that Jesus proclaims, let’s, therefore, step back for a moment and briefly consider the Kingdom of David that Jesus brought to fulfillment. There were three key positions in the Davidic kingdom that served the King: The Steward, the Queen Mother and the Priesthood.

## **The Steward (Isaiah 22:21-24, Matthew 16:17-19)**

Let's turn to Isaiah 22:21-24, which tells about a man named Eliakim who will be assuming the important role as the king's right-hand man, the steward.

### ***(Read Isaiah 22:21-24)***

4. What do these verses tell us about Eliakim's role?

*Answer: He will be given a robe symbolizing his authority. He will be a father to the citizens of Judah. He will receive the key to the house of David as a symbol of his authority. He will be a peg in a sure place — a source of strength, stability and unity for the kingdom.*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

The Davidic Kings had a steward, or in Hebrew, an *'al habbayit* (literally the one "over the house") who was in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom and who ruled the kingdom whenever the king was away. He was not the king, but the steward was given authority from the king to manage the kingdom on his behalf (Isaiah 22:20-21). We see in this passage that the *'al habbayit* was described as a father to the citizens of the kingdom (Isaiah 22:21), and a sign of his authority was the keys of the kingdom (Isaiah 22:22).

Just like the Davidic kings of old, Jesus has close associates who participate in his mission. If Jesus is announcing a kingdom, we should expect that he would have a steward, a right-hand man, vested with his authority, an *'al habbayit*, like they did.

### ***(Read Matthew 16:17-19)***

5. In this passage, Jesus tells Peter he will give him the “keys of the kingdom.” What did the keys of the kingdom of David symbolize in Isaiah 22:22? In light of that background, what do you think this means for Peter?

*Answer: In a dramatic turning point in his ministry, Jesus tells his Apostle Peter he will give him “the keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19) — which we have seen is the Biblical symbol for the office of the ‘al habbayit (Isaiah 22:22). In giving Peter “the keys of the kingdom” Jesus is establishing Peter as the steward of his kingdom, the one in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom, especially when the King, Jesus, goes away — when he rises from the dead and ascends into heaven. It will be Peter who is the rock of the Church Jesus is building (Matthew 16:18).*

6. What do you think this might tell us about the role of Peter’s successor in the Kingdom Christ is announcing?

*Answer: Just as the steward of old (the ‘al habbayit) held an office, with successors who have real authority, so Peter is given this office of leadership in Christ’s kingdom, and he is the first of many successors, all the way down to the current person holding this office, the pope today. And just as the ‘al habbayit, was called a “father” to the citizens of the kingdom, so we call Peter’s successor “Pope,” which means “papa.” Indeed, the Pope is rightly called “Holy Father” by Catholics, because the Pope is our spiritual father representing Christ the King to us today.*

## **The Queen Mother (1 Kings 2:13-20, Revelation 12:1-2)**

Now let's consider a second important leadership position in the Davidic Kingdom: the Queen Mother. It was common in the ancient near eastern world to bestow the queenship on the king's mother. While the kings of old often had many wives, they each had only one mother, so the queenship was given to her.

The same is true in the Davidic Kingdom, where the Queen Mother held an official position of authority in the kingdom (2 Kings 24:11, 14), shared in the king's shepherding of the people (Jeremiah 13:18), served as a counselor to her royal son (Proverbs 31:1-31), and most of all, was a powerful intercessor for the people, bringing petitions from the citizens of the kingdom to her royal son (1 Kings 2:13-20).

Could someone please read 1 Kings 2:13-20, which tells about how Bathsheba is treated when her son Solomon becomes king?

### ***(Read 1 Kings 2:13-20)***

7. What does this passage tell us about the important role of the Queen Mother? How did the Queen Mother exert her influence in the kingdom?

*Answer: We see this Queen Mother, Bathsheba, is viewed as a powerful advocate, a powerful intercessor for the people. Shortly after she becomes Queen Mother, a man named Adonijah brings a petition to Bathsheba for her to present to her son, King Solomon. Adonijah is so confident in her intercessory role that he says, "Ask King Solomon — he will not refuse you." King Solomon greets the Queen Mother by bowing down before her and honors her by having a throne brought in for her to sit at his right hand, the position of*

*authority. Solomon expresses how much he values her intercessory role as the Queen Mother, saying: "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you."*<sup>1</sup>

8. How do you think this background of the Queen Mother sheds light on the mother of Jesus in the New Testament?

*Answer: Just as the Davidic kings of old had their mothers reign as Queen Mother, so Jesus' mother, Mary, serves in that role. Again, this is just following the basic Biblical logic: if Jesus is the King and Mary is Jesus' mother, then Mary would be seen, from a Biblical perspective, as the Queen Mother.*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

Now, let's turn to another passage that helps us further understand the role of the Queen Mother. Could someone please read Revelation 12:1-2, a passage that offers a vision of the mother of the messiah in heaven?

***(Read Revelation 12:1-2)***

<sup>1</sup> As Edward Sri explains, "Though in this instance, the request is refused, this does not deny the Queen Mother's intercessory role. "The fact that Solomon denies the request in no way discredits the influence of the [g]ebirah. Adonijah wanted Abishag the Shunammite for the treacherous purpose of taking over the kingdom from Solomon.' Gray, 'God's Word and Mary's Royal Office,' 381, n. 16. Taking the king's concubine was a sign of usurping the throne in the ancient Near East. For example, see how Absalom (Adonijah's older brother), in his attempt to take the throne from David, took his concubines (2 Sm 16:20-23). Gray continues, "Thus the wickedness of Adonijah's intention is the reason for denial, which in no way reflects negatively upon the [g]ebirah's power to intercede. The narrative bears out the fact that the king normally accepted the [g]ebirah's request, thus Solomon says, "Ask, I will not refuse you." To say then that this illustrates the weakness of the [g]ebirah's ability to intercede would be to miss the whole point of the narrative, which tells how Adonijah uses the queen mother's position in an attempt to become king.' Gray, 'God's Word and Mary's Royal Office,' 381, n. 16, *emphasis added*" (Edward Sri, *Rethinking Mary in the New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018) p. 266.)

9. How is Jesus' mother depicted in this heavenly vision?

*Answer: Mary appears as a queen. First, this “woman clothed with the sun” in Revelation 12 is revealed to be the mother of the one who is caught up to God's throne and rules all nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 12:5; Psalm 2:9) — in other words, she is the mother of the messiah king. Moreover, the mother of the messiah is decked in royal splendor, like a queen, wearing a crown of 12 stars on her head — symbolizing the twelve apostles upon which Christ's Church is built (Revelation 12:1-2). The Bible makes clear her royal office as Queen Mother.*

10. We saw that the Queen Mothers in the Davidic Kingdom exercised their authority by serving as powerful intercessors. How might this background shed light on Mary's role in Christ's Kingdom?

*Answer: Since the Queen Mothers of old served as advocates for the people, it's fitting that Mary, our Queen Mother, plays the same role. She is our advocate. Just as the citizens of the kingdom brought their petitions to the Queen Mother, and the Queen Mother presented those petitions to her royal son, so Mary intercedes for us, lovingly praying for all our needs. And the prayers of her mother's heart are powerful. When she intercedes, it's as if Jesus says to her what the King said to the Queen Mother Bathsheba: “Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you” (1 Kings 2:20).*

### **Priesthood for a New Liturgy (1 Chronicles 24:1-5, 24:31; Acts 1:21-26)**

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

Now, let's consider a third important leadership role in David's kingdom: the priests.

After David becomes king, he reorganizes the ancient Levitical priesthood around a new liturgy that involves the Levites invoking, thanking and praising the Lord before God's holy presence over the Ark of the Covenant, which has been brought into David's capital city of Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:4-7). They sing hymns known as the Psalms, many of which were written by David himself (1 Chronicles 16:8-36). And they continually offer worship to God before the Ark every morning and evening — which was the first Biblical form of perpetual adoration (1 Chronicles 16:37, 40). Let's read about how David assigned these priestly duties.

***(Read 1 Chronicles 24:1-5 and 24:31)***

11. There are a lot of names in these verses, but we want to investigate one important thing: According to these verses, how did David organize the priestly duties? In other words, what method did David use to assign which priest to which duty for worship?

*Answer: David organizes the Levites into 24 different groups, each taking turns to do different duties for serving in worship (1 Chronicles 24:1-18). Which priest did which duty was determined by casting lots (1 Chronicles 24:5, 31). For the pagans, casting lots was simply a random game of chance (as we see with the Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus' garments at Calvary – see John 19:24). But for the Jews, the practice of casting lots was different. It was sacred. Casting lots was a way to discern God's will, especially as it related to priestly duties. The Jews believed that casting lots revealed God's choice for which priest should perform which role in worship each day (1 Chronicles 24:31; Luke 1:8-9). That's why lots were cast in the*



*presence of the king to determine which priest would do which duty for worship in the Jerusalem sanctuary.*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

Similar to David, Jesus organizes a new priesthood to serve the new liturgy of the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, he establishes the twelve apostles as priests, commanding them to continue celebrating the Eucharist, making present the gift of his body and blood for generations to come. He says to them, "Do this as a memorial of me." Priests offer sacrifice and that's what Jesus commands the apostles to do: make present the sacrifice of his body and blood so that all peoples might enter into the perfect gift of his love on the Cross.

But it's not just at the Last Supper that we see the Apostles being called to serve as priests. Let's consider what happens after Jesus ascends into heaven. The Apostles must decide how to replace Judas, the one who betrayed Christ and then killed himself. Could someone please read Acts 1:21-26?

***(Read Acts 1:21-26)***

12. How did the Apostles determine who would replace Judas' office?

*Answer: Casting Lots*

13. What was casting lots associated with for the ancient Jews?

*Answer: Casting lots was a way for determining priestly duties, as we saw with David in 1 Chronicles 24:5 and 24:31.*

14. So, what does this scene tell us about the role of the Apostles and their successors?

*Answer: The Apostles knew they had a responsibility to find a successor to step into this office, which was meant to be passed on from one person to the next throughout the ages. And the way they decided who would fill this spot of Judas was to cast lots (Acts 1:21-26). Remember, for the Jews, casting lots was not a game of chance. It was a way to discern God's will about priestly duties. The fact that the Apostles cast lots points to how they understood the important office they were needing to fill — an official position in Christ's kingdom that was so important it would have successors throughout the generations — the office of the new priesthood.*

### **Conclusion: All in the Family**

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

The Kingdom. The Son of David. The *'al habbayit*. The Queen Mother. The New Priesthood for a New Liturgy. These are just some of the essential parts of the royal covenant family Jesus is inviting us all to enter. And remember, this kingdom is not just for the Jewish people; it's for all humanity. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 3 of this study, Jesus doesn't come to save us individually, isolated from each other. He comes to unite us together, to heal the broken, divided human family and reunite us in the one, royal covenant family of God, the Catholic Church. In the Church, you and I are not just friends or members of the same religious club. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. And because of the life of Christ dwelling in all of us, we can truly call God our Father, Mary our mother and our *'al habbayit* (the pope) Holy Father. True followers of Jesus gather together to worship God in the

new liturgy of the Eucharist, led by the members of the new priesthood who make Christ's gift of his body and blood in the Eucharist present for us to be united with Our Lord in Holy Communion at Mass.

15. Looking at these aspects of the family of God, the Church, we can see that Jesus had a very specific plan for his family. How has this study helped you understand the Church more fully?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Note to the leader: Please read aloud.*

What we learned today also challenges us personally. Saying "Yes" to Jesus involves saying "Yes" to all that he reveals to us and offers us through his Church. Though it's trendy today for people to say, "I'm OK with Jesus, but I don't need a Church" or "I can be spiritual, but I'm not religious," that's not what Jesus himself actually taught. The Bible reveals there's a close connection between the King and His Kingdom, between Christ and His Church, between Jesus and his prime minister, queen mother, and priests. He said to his apostles, "Whoever receives you, receives me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me" (Luke 10:16). We can't love the King but reject his Kingdom. We can't fully accept Christ but reject His Church.

16. Why do you think people say they are "spiritual but not religious?" What about you? Do you accept the Church as God's covenant family, or do you struggle to accept the Church and her teaching? Why or why not?

*Allow the group to discuss. God has revealed himself in a specific way through Jesus Christ and has given us the Church as the key avenue for sharing in his life. To say that we are "spiritual but not religious"*

*is to say we want to know God, but not in the way that he has given us to know him — through his grace in the sacraments and his truth through Church teaching. This leads to a danger, where instead of pursuing God as he has invited us, we simply live according to our own preference and claim it is “spiritual.” As Edward Sri explains, “One danger, however, of seeking God all on our own, apart from the Church, is that we make God in our own image and likeness; it’s too easy to tailor a spirituality and morality that suits our own comforts, lifestyles, and interests. After all, being ‘spiritual but not religious’ would be a very appealing option for someone who still wants to have some sense of God in his life — someone whose conscience is uneasy about rejecting God entirely — but who wants to keep God at arm’s reach and still do his own thing.”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Edward Sri, *Love Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 134.



