



BIG PICTURE

Lenten Guide

Day 22 - Sunday, March 15, 2026

Background:

Today we jump ahead to the end of 40 years in the desert. During this time, there have been other instances of the Israelite's unfaithfulness, but largely the people have come to trust God. We are now around 1240 BC. The generation that left Egypt has all passed away (except for Joshua and Caleb). Even Moses (at age 120) and Aaron have passed away and Joshua has become the new leader. Those who were left have only known the hard life of wandering in the desert and have been through many battles. They are willing to follow God, but still understand that the people who currently lived in the Promised Land will not leave easily. The Lord reminds Joshua that if they are strong and steadfast, observing the entire law given to them by Moses, He would be with them every step of the way, allowing them to easily defeat the inhabitants. Our story picks up today with them crossing the Jordan river to the land promised to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob.

Read:

Crossing the Jordan: Finally Entering the Promised Land — *Joshua 3*

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/joshua/3>

Notice:

Just as God held back the waters of the Red Sea, God also held back the waters of the Jordan river so the people could cross on dry land. As had been the custom, God instructed the 12 people holding the Ark (the wooden box containing the tablets with 10 commandments) to lead the way. As they stand in the river, the water stops flowing. The whole group of the Israelites crosses, and then some memorial stones are removed from the dry riverbed. Finally, as those carrying the Ark reach the far side of the river, the flow of water returns. The next chapter tells of them creating an altar from those stones to remember what God had done there.

Reflect:

Over 800 years have passed since God first promised this land, with over 400 years of being enslaved in Egypt and another 40 wandering in the desert. God makes good on his promises, but the people who first heard these promises don't live to see them fulfilled. Spend some time

reflecting on how much time you assume it will take God to answer your own prayers. Do you expect them to be answered immediately? Do you struggle to trust God when there is a delay? When God finally acts, do you meet the moment with joy or annoyance at the delay?

Day 23 - Monday, March 16, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead to Joshua's renewal of the covenant. We have skipped over the slow process of the Israelites conquering each of the cities in the Promised Land and either driving out or killing all the Canaanite inhabitants, per God's orders and with his assistance. The idea was that there would be no one left to worship any other Gods in that land, as the worshipping of false or foreign Gods had been a problem for the Israelites over the centuries. Although to our modern sensibilities, it can be difficult to understand why God would assist in the slaying of these inhabitants, the often outnumbered Israelites understood their victories as a sure sign that God was with them. Once the entire land had been conquered, Jonathan divided it up among the 12 tribes of Israel (descended from the 12 sons of Jacob). Each tribe settled in its own area. Today's story begins when some time has passed, and Joshua is nearing death. He calls leaders and representatives of the tribes together to renew the covenant.

Read:

Covenant Renewal at Shechem — *Joshua 24:1–28*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua%2024%3A1-28&version=NABRE>

Notice:

This passage begins with a “big picture” reminder of all God has done for Israel up to this point. While we've skipped over a few of the events, most should now be familiar to you. After this summary, Joshua presents them with a choice - commit to serving this God who has been so good to them, or commit to one of the other Gods. The Israelite people, having been reminded of all God had done for them, seem eager and willing to commit to God, but Joshua warns that might be harder than they think, suggesting God might not be lenient with them in the future. But the people commit again to serving God. Joshua marks their commitment by placing a large stone as a reminder and witness to all they have promised.

Reflect:

It can be helpful to remind ourselves of all that God has done for us. Take a few moments to review your day, looking for the ways God was present, and expressing gratitude for those moments. Joshua asked the people to recommit to God. What are some ways you regularly recommit to God? Would you benefit from doing any of these more frequently?

Day 24 - Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Background:

Yesterday we left off with the Israelites renewing their commitment to God. Our passage today summarizes the two hundred years of their history after Joshua died. Rather than having one main leader, a series of officials known as judges govern the people. While Joshua had cleared most of the promised land of the previous occupants, pockets of the Canaanites remained (sometimes as servants of the Israelites). The presence of these foreigners and the foreign Gods they worship (known as Baals) provide another temptation for the Israelites to stray from their commitment to God. The passage describes a cycling pattern of faithfulness: First, the Israelites enjoyed God's blessing, then they were unfaithful, so God let them be conquered by invading armies. The Israelites would cry out for mercy, and God would appoint a judge to help them conquer the invading army. Afterwards, for a period of time, they would repent and again be faithful, but often when the judge died, they would fall back into worshipping foreign Gods, and the cycle would repeat.

Read:

Cycle of Sin and Deliverance — *Judges 2:8-23*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judges%20%3A8-23&version=NABRE>

Notice:

The cycle described (beginning with faithfulness to God, enjoying the blessings that followed, and later forgetting that God provided those blessings, leading the people to waver in their commitment to God) not only summarized the time described in the book of Judges, but could describe the larger pattern of the entire Old Testament. The Israelites seem fickle in part because this summary jams decades or centuries into a few sentences. The passage alludes to at least one reason for their wavering - each new generation has no memory of needing to be rescued, being rescued, or the new life that followed. They take life and God's blessing for granted.

Reflect:

Like the Israelites, do you sometimes forget God's blessings and waver in your commitment to God? Does a modern emphasis on self-sufficiency and hard work make it hard to acknowledge the many ways in which God is the source of all blessing? Who are the people God sends you that help you recognize your blessings and be faithful? In prayer, count your blessings and examine any ways you may be taking them for granted.

Day 25 - Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Background:

Samuel was the last of the judges appointed by God. We are now around 1100 BC. The Israelites alive during this period have no memory of the time in the desert, the triumphant taking of the Promised Land, or the renewal of the covenant under Joshua. What they have known is that they are frequently either at war or in danger of being invaded. They see that the nations around them that keep invading them have a king, so in today's reading they ask for one.

Read:**Israel Demands a King — 1 Samuel 8**

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1samuel/8>

Notice:

While on a surface level, wanting a strong leader doesn't seem sinful, God understands it to be just another way the people are rejecting his plan and his leadership. Rather than asking for a new judge, they want to control their own destiny, based not on God's plan for them, but based on envy of neighboring nations. God makes this clear when he says to Samuel - 'they aren't rejecting you, they are rejecting me...deserting me to serve other gods.' This desire to control their own destiny is not that different from the decision made so long ago by Adam and Eve. And like Adam and Eve, having warned them of the dangers, God allows them to move forward with their own plan.

Reflect:

How much do you like to be in control of your situation in life? Does that desire limit your ability to trust God? Just like Adam and Eve, and just like the Israelites we read about today, God gives us enormous freedom to choose to follow him or not. What is one way you can let God be in control today? Will you?

Day 26 - Thursday, March 19, 2026**Background:**

Although not in today's reading, the very first King Samuel chose was Saul, who quickly disobeyed God. So, long before Saul died, God decided that Saul's sons would not be allowed to rule and instead called on Samuel to appoint David (as we heard at Mass this past weekend). However, David did not immediately take on the throne. He served Saul in his household, where he played the harp, became like a son to Saul, and served in battle (killing Goliath among other victories). Every victory David had in battle led his popularity to surge, and caused Saul to view David as a threat. As a result of his jealousy, Saul sought to have David killed in battle, and when that failed, simply tried to kill him directly. David fled, forced into living in hiding to avoid

the bounty on his head. Twice during this period, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, which would have allowed David to take the throne. David, however, spares Saul twice. Our reading today is the second of these encounters between the two.

Read:

David spares Saul - 1 Samuel 26

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1samuel/26>

Notice:

The contrast between Saul's self absorption and David's decency and trust in God could not be more clear. Despite the way he has been mistreated by Saul, David understands that Saul is still God's anointed, and that it is not David's place to claim his promised kingship before God decided to grant it to him. Consider the contrast between David's attitude of complete trust in God with the impatience of Abram and Sarai's waiting for an heir, or with the Israelite's asking Aaron to create the Golden calf because Moses hadn't returned promptly. However, David wants this act of decency known to Saul, perhaps hoping that by sparing his life a second time, Saul might finally realize that David is not a threat to him, and let him live in peace. So he points out that he has Saul's spear and water jug, and Saul comes to repent of his jealousy and stop seeking David's downfall.

Reflect:

Why would God have allowed Samuel to pick Saul as king if he turned out to be so unfaithful? The question implies that people are either bad or good, and somehow God allowed Samuel to pick a "bad guy" as king. But in reality, we all have moments when we don't live up to our good intentions - we get caught up in selfishness, or jealousy, or we hang onto past hurts and grudges - and make poor choices. During this season of Lenten repentance, ask God to reveal anything you need to repent of today.

Day 27 - Friday, March 20, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead again - Saul and three of his sons have been killed in battle. David has taken his throne in the south. Saul's remaining son attempted to also take the throne in the north and war ensued. Gradually David earns the loyalty of the remaining tribes. Saul's son is killed by his own military leaders, hoping to gain favor with David - who is appalled by this unnecessary violence. After conferring with all of the tribes, David is formally anointed as king, and establishes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and it becomes known as the city of David. He moves the ark of the covenant there, and desires to build a temple for it. God through the

prophet Nathan says that he will not be the one to build the temple, but then renews the covenant with David, promising that a descendent of David will rule forever.

Read:

The Davidic Covenant: An Everlasting Throne — 2 Samuel 7:8–24

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel%207%3A8-24&version=NABRE>

Notice:

Through the prophet Nathan, God reveals clearly for the first time a descendant that will rule forever from a royal throne. We understand that descendant to be Jesus. God also promises a time of peace when his chosen people won't be constantly under attack from neighboring countries seeking their land. David's response is one of humility (e.g., who am I that you should...) and gratitude. David's humility contains both a false modesty (he has been among the most faithful people we've met so far), and a real modesty there (even though I've been faithful, this all seems too good to be true). David responds by promising that Israel shall always be God's people. God's promise to Abram centuries earlier - that his descendants would become a great nation, bringing blessing to other nations - seems very much to be fulfilled at this moment.

Reflect:

What role does humility have in your life? Do you tend to oversell or underestimate your faithfulness, skills, and talents? Do you honestly acknowledge your sins and shortcomings? We tend to have difficulty seeing ourselves as God does, because we often focus on how we see ourselves and how other people see us. Spend some time considering how God sees you, with all your strengths and weaknesses.

Day 28 - Saturday, March 21, 2026

Background:

We move ahead to an important incident in the life of King David - a moment of sin. Since he became King, he has moved the capital to Jerusalem, and oversaw a large army that defended Israel. Over his life, he has acquired several wives as well as concubines, which was within the social norms of his day for leaders. Today we read of the moment when David fell to temptation.

Read:

David's Sin - 2 Samuel 11

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/2samuel/11>

Notice:

There are several sins shown in this passage that build on one another - one of the deadly sins - lust, leads to breaking the commands against coveting a neighbor's wife, adultery, and murder. From a modern standard, it is also difficult to establish if Bathsheba was asked for or gave consent, or if rape should be added to the list. And given that he had numerous other wives and concubines, another question arises about his inability to be satisfied with what he already had. Finally in ordering the murder by hopeless battlefield tactic, David is drawing other people into his sin, forcing his military commanders to give unjust orders that should bother their consciences and using enemy soldiers to kill so he doesn't have to. It is difficult to reconcile David's behavior with his previous concern about following standards of decency and observing God's law. One wonders if God would still describe him as "a man after God's own heart."

Reflect:

Have your own sins ever built on one another? Perhaps trying to cover up a minor sin led you to commit a bigger one. Or perhaps accepting minor sins as no big deal desensitized you to even knowing they were sins. How can you guard against this pattern of one poor choice leading to more poor choices in your life? Take some time today to examine your own conscience, looking not just for sins, but for the attitudes and situations that make you likely to make sinful choices.